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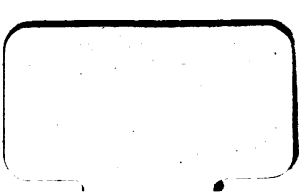
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THE

HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS:

A STORY OF TWO FAMILIES.

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY,
AUTHOR OF 'GEOFFRY HAMLYN,' "RAVENSHOE," ETC.



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1865.

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AUTHOR'S EDITION.



SECOND EDITION.

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THIS TALE IS DEDICATED

TO

MY WIFE.

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PREFACE.

In this story, an uneducated girl, who might, I fancy, after a year and a half at a boarding-school, have developed into a very noble lady, is arraigned before the reader, and awaits his judgment.

The charge against her is, that, by an overstrained idea of duty, she devoted herself to her brother, and made her lover but a secondary person. I am instructed to reply on her behalf, that, in the struggle between inclination and what she considered her duty, she, right or wrong, held by duty at the risk of breaking her own heart.

I know what *I* think about the old question between love and duty; but, since what I think is not the least consequence, I shall not state my conclusions. I have used all my best art in putting the question before the reader, and must leave him to draw his own. I am only sorry to see such a very important social question (a question which, thanks to the nobleness of our women, comes *en visage* to us continually) so very poorly handled.

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CONTENTS.

Chapter		Page
I.	Mr. Secretary Oxton thinks Gerty Neville little better than a Fool	1
II.	James Burton's Story: shows the disgraceful lowness of his Origin	6
III.	James Burton's Story: Cousin Reuben	11
IV.	The Colonial Secretary sees Snakes and other Vermin	13
V.	James Burton's Story: the Ghost's Room is invaded, and James puts his Foot through the Floor	18
VI.	James Burton's Story: the Preliminaries to the momentous Expedition to Stanlake	24
VII.	The Battle of Barker's Gap	31
VIII.	James Burton's Story: the Immediate Results of the Expedition to Stanlake	37
IX.	Sir George Hillyar	44
X.	Erne makes his Escape from the Brazen Tower	48
XI.	The Secretary sees nothing for it but to Submit	52
XII.	Disposes of Samuel Burton for a time	57
XIII.	James Burton's Story: the Golden Thread begins to run off the Reel	60
XIV.	The Gleam of the Autumn Sunset	68
XV.	In which the Snake creeps out of the Grass	72
XVI.	James Burton's Story: Erne and Emma	76
XVII.	Erne and Reuben	81
XVIII.	James Burton's Story: Reuben and Sir George Hillyar	84
XIX.	Samuel Burton goes into the Licensed Victualling line	91
XX.	James Burton's Story: Reuben entertains Mysterious and Unsatisfactory Company	96
XXI.	Gerty goes on the War-Trail	101
XXII.	James Burton's Story: Very Low Company	108

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XXIII. James Burton's Story: the Hillyars and the Burtons among the Tombs 113
XXIV. Homeward Bound 121
XXV. Gerty's First Innings 125
XXVI. James Burton's Story: James and his Sister fall out 133
XXVII. James Burton's Story: the Ghost shows a Light for the First Time 136
XXVIII. Affairs at Stanlake 146
XXIX. James Burton's Story: the Beginning of the Bad Times 151
XXX. James Burton's Story: in which two great Pieces of Good Fortune befall us,—one Visible, the other Invisible 158
XXXI. George begins to take a new interest in Reuben 163
XXXII. Gerty's Hybernation Terminates 171
XXXIII. J. Burton's Story: the Ghost shows a Light for the Second Time 173
XXXIV. Sir George's Escritoire 180
XXXV. James Burton's Story: Miss Brown's Troubles come to an End, while Mr. Erne Hillyar's fairly commence 186
XXXVI. Le Roi est Mort.—Vive le Roi 190
XXXVII. James Burton's Story: Erne's Nurse 193
XXXVIII. Sir George Hillyar is Witness for Character . 196
XXXIX. Uncle Bob surprises Erne 201
XL. The Last of the Church-yard 205
XLI. Emma's Work begins to be cut out for her . . 210
XLII. Emma astonishes a good many People: the Members of her Family in particular 215
XLIII. Emma gives the Key to the Landlord 224
XLIV. James Burton's Story: our Voyage, with a long Description of some queer Fish that we saw . . 230
XLV. Gerty in Society 241
XLVI. The Letter, which was not from Mrs. Nalder . . 246
XLVII. Sir George Hillyar starts on his Adventure . 251
XLVIII. James Burton's Story: the Forge is lit up once more 256
XLIX. In which two Bad Pennies come back 266
L. Trevittick's latent Madness begins to appear . 271
LI. Changes in the Romilly Home 281
LII. Feeds the Boar at the Old Frank? 289
LIII. James Burton's Story: the Clayton Ménage . . 299

Digitized by Google

LIV. Emma's Visit 303
LV. The Land Sale 306
LVI. The Burnt Hut Company 313
LVII. The Last of the Forge 318
LVIII. Erne goes on his Adventures 321
LIX. James Oxton goes out, and Widow North comes in 324
LX. Too Late! Too Late! 328
LXI. Husband and Wife 332
LXII. Gerty's Anabasis 335
LXIII. Samuel Burton gets a Fright 341
LXIV. Samuel Burton's Resolution 344
LXV. Ex-Secretary Oxton gets a Lesson 347
LXVI. Something to do 351
LXVII. The Backstairs History of Two Great Coalitions . 353
LXVIII. Samuel Burton makes his Last Appearance at Stanlake 360
LXIX. Sir George and Samuel close their Accounts, and Dissolve Partnership 363
LXX. Reuben's Temptation 371
LXXI. James Burton's Story 376
LXXII. The Omeo Disaster 381
LXXIII. The Midnight Meeting 389
LXXIV. The Sky brightening 391
LXXV. Emma's angelic Ministrations 395
LXXVI. James Burton's Story: Captain Arkwright goes back once more 403
LXXVII. The Cyclone 405
LXXVIII. James Burton's Story: No Answer 412
LXXIX. Conclusion 417

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THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS.

CHAPTER I.

MR. SECRETARY OXTON THINKS GERTY NEVILLE LITTLE BETTER THAN A FOOL.

THE Houses were "up" and the Colonial Secretary was in the bosom of his family.

It had been one of the quietest and pleasantest little sessions on record. All the Government bills had slid easily through. There had been a little hitch on the new Scab Bill; several members with infected runs opposing it lustily; threatening to murder it by inches in committee, and so on: but, on the Secretary saying that he should not feel it his duty to advise his Excellency to prorogue until it was passed, other members put it to the opposing members whether they were to sit there till Christmas, with the thermometer at 120°, and the opposing members gave way with a groan; so a very few days afterwards his Excellency put on his best uniform, cocked hat, sword and all, and came down, and prorogued them. And then, taking their boys from school, and mounting their horses, they all rode away, east, north, and west, through forest and swamp, over plain and mountain, to their sunny homes, by the pleasant river-sides of the interior.

So the Colonial Secretary was in the bosom of his family. He was sitting in his veranda in a rocking-chair, dressed in white from head to foot, with the exception of his boots, which were shining black, and his necktie, which was bright blue. He was a tall man, and of noble presence, — a man of two-and-forty, or thereabouts, — with a fine fearless eye, as of one who had confronted the dangers of an infant colony, looking altogether like the highly intellectual, educated man he was; and on every button of his clean white coat, on every fold of his spotless linen, in every dimple of his close-shaved, red-brown face, was written in large letters the word, Gentleman.

He had come down to one of his many stations, the favorite

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one, lying about sixty miles along the coast from Palmerston, the capital of Cooksland; and, having arrived only the night before, was dreaming away the morning in his veranda, leaving the piles of papers, domestic and parliamentary, which he had accumulated on a small table beside him, totally neglected.

For it was impossible to work. The contrast between the burning streets of Palmerston and this cool veranda was so exquisite, that it became an absolute necessity to think about that and nothing else. Just outside, in the sun, a garden, a wilderness of blazing flowers, sloped rapidly down to the forest, whose topmost boughs were level with your feet. Through the forest rushed the river, and beyond the forest was the broad, yellow plain, and beyond the plain the heath, and beyond the heath the gleaming sea, with two fantastic purple islands on the horizon.

The Colonial Secretary had no boys to bring home from school, for only six months before this he had married the beauty of the colony, Miss Neville, who was at that moment in the garden with her youngest sister gathering flowers.

The Secretary by degrees allowed his eyes to wander from the beautiful prospect before him, to the two white figures among the flowers. By degrees his attention became concentrated on them, and after a time a shade of dissatisfaction stole over his handsome face, and a wrinkle or two formed on his broad forehead.

Why was this? The reason was a very simple one: he saw that Mrs. Oxton was only half intent upon her flowers, and was keeping one eye upon her lord and master. He said, "Botheration."

She saw that he spoke, though she little thought what he said; and so she came floating easily towards him through the flowers, looking by no means unlike a great white and crimson Amaryllis herself. She may have been a thought too fragile, a thought too hectic, — all real Australian beauties are so; she looked, indeed, as though, if you blew at her, her hair would come off like the down of a dandelion, but nevertheless she was so wonderfully beautiful, that you could barely restrain an exclamation of delighted surprise when you first saw her. This being came softly up to the Secretary, put her arm round his neck, and kissed him; and yet the Secretary gave no outward signs of satisfaction whatever. Still the Secretary was not a "brute"; far from it.

"My love," said Mrs. Oxton.

"Well, my dear," said the Secretary.

"I want to ask you a favor, my love."

"My sweetest Agnes, it is quite impossible. I will send Edward as sub-overseer to Tullabaloora; but into a Government place he *does not go*."

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"My dear James ——"

"It is no use, Agnes; it is really no use. I have been accused in the public papers of placing too many of my own and my wife's family. I have been taunted with it in the House. There is great foundation of truth in it. It is really no use, if you talk till doomsday. What are you going to give me for lunch?"

Mrs. Oxton was perfectly unmoved; she merely seated herself comfortably on her husband's knee.

"Suppose, now," she said, "that you had been putting yourself in a wicked passion for nothing. Suppose I had changed my mind about Edward. Suppose I thought you quite right in not placing any more of our own people. And suppose I only wanted a little information about somebody's antecedents. What then?"

"Why then I have been a brute. Say on."

"My dearest James. Do you know anything against Lieutenant Hillyar?"

"H'm," said the Secretary. "Nothing new. He came over here under a cloud; but so many young men do that. I am chary of asking too many questions. He was very fast at home, I believe, and went rambling through Europe for ten years; yet I do not think I should be justified in saying I knew anything very bad against him."

"He will be Sir George Hillyar," said Mrs. Oxton, pensively.

"He will indeed," said the Secretary, "and have ten thousand a year. He will be a catch for some one."

"My dear, I am afraid he is caught."

"No! Who is it?"

"No other than our poor Gerty. She has been staying at the Barkers', in the same house with him; and the long and the short of it is, that they are engaged."

The Secretary rose and walked up and down the veranda. He was very much disturbed.

"My dear," he said at last, "I would give a thousand pounds if this were not true."

"Why? do you know anything against him?"

"Well, just now I carelessly said I did not; but now when the gentleman coolly proposes himself for my brother-in-law! It is perfectly intolerable!"

"Do you know anything special, James?"

"No. But look at the man, my love. Look at his insolent, contradictory manner. Look at that nasty drop he has in his eyes. Look at his character for profligacy. Look at his unpopularity in the force; and then think of our beautiful little Gerty being handed over to such a man. Oh! Lord, you know it really is ——"

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"I hate the man as much as you do," said Mrs. Oxton. "I can't bear to be in the room with him. But Gerty loves him."

"Poor little bird."

"And he is handsome."

"Confound him, yes. And charming too, of course, with his long pale face and his *dolce far-niente*, insolent manner, and his great eyes like blank windows, out of which the Devil looks once a day, for fear you might forget he was there. Oh! a charming man!"

"Then he will be a baronet, with an immense fortune; and Gerty will be Lady Hillyar."

"And the most unfortunate little flower in the wide world," said the Secretary.

"I think you are right," said Mrs. Oxton, with a sigh. "See, here she comes; don't let her know I have told you."

Gertrude Neville came towards them at this moment. She was very like her sister, but still more fragile in form; a kind of caricature of her sister. The white in her face was whiter, and the red redder; her hair was of a shade more brilliant brown; and she looked altogether like some wonderful hectic ghost. If you were delighted with her sister's beauty you were awed with hers; not awed because there was anything commanding or determined in the expression of her face, but because she was so very fragile and gentle. The first glance of her great hazel eyes put her under your protection to the death. You had a feeling of awe, while you wondered why it had pleased God to create anything so helpless, so beautiful, and so good, and to leave her to the chances and troubles of this rough world. You could no more have willingly caused a shade of anxiety to pass over that face, than you could have taken the beautiful little shell parrakeet, which sat on her shoulder, and killed it before her eyes.

The Secretary set his jaw, and swore, to himself, that *it* should never be; but what was the good of his swearing?

"See, James," she said to him, speaking with a voice like that of a stock-dove among the deep black shadows of an English wood in June, "I am going to fill all your vases with flowers. Idle Agnes has run away to you, and has left me all the work. See here; I am going to set these great fern boughs round the china vase on the centre-table, and bend them so that they droop, you see. And then I shall lay in these long wreaths of scarlet Kennedia to hang over the fern, and then I shall tangle in these scarlet passion-flowers, and then I shall have a circle of these belladonna lilies, and in the centre of all I shall put this moss-rosebud, —

"For the bride she chose, the red, red, rose,
And by its thorn died she.

"James, don't break my heart, for I love him. My own

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brother, I have never had a brother but you; try to make the best of him for my sake. You will now, won't you? I know you don't like him, — your characters are dissimilar, — but I am sure you will get to. I did not like him at first; but it came upon me in time. You don't know how really good he is, and how bitterly he has been ill-used. Come, James, say you will try to like him."

What could the poor Secretary do but soothe her, and defer any decided opinion on the matter. If it had been Mr. Cornelius Murphy making a modest request, the Secretary would have been stern enough, would have done what he should have done here, — put his veto on it once and forever; but he could not stand his favorite little sister-in-law, with her tears, her beauty, and her caresses. He temporized.

But his holiday, to which he had looked forward so long, was quite spoilt. Little Gerty Neville had wound herself so thoroughly round his heart; she had been such a sweet little confidant to him in his courtship; had brought so many precious letters, had planned so many meetings; had been, in short, such a dear little go-between, that when he thought of her being taken away from him by a man of somewhat queer character, whom he heartily despised and disliked, it made him utterly miserable. As Gerty had been connected closely with the brightest part of a somewhat stormy life, so also neither he nor his wife had ever laid down a plan for the brighter future which did not include her; and now! — it was intolerable.

He brooded for three days, and then, having seen to the more necessary part of his station-work, he determined to go and make fuller inquiries. So the big bay horse was saddled, and he rode thoughtfully away; across the paddocks, through the forest, over the plain, down to the long yellow sands fringed with snarling surf, and so northward towards the faint blue promontory of Cape Wilberforce.

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CHAPTER II.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: SHOWS THE DISGRACEFUL LOWNESS OF HIS ORIGIN.

I AM of the same trade as my father, — a blacksmith, — although I have not had hammer or pincers in my hand this ten years. And although I am not in the most remote degree connected with any aristocratic family, yet I hold the title of Honorable. The Honorable James Burton being a member of the Supreme Council of the Colony of Cooksland.

As early as I can remember, my father carried on his trade in Brown's Row, Chelsea. His business was a very good one, — what we call a good shoeing trade, principally with the omnibus horses. It paid very well, for my father had four men in his shop; though, if he had had his choice, he would have preferred some higher branch of smith's work, for he had considerable mechanical genius, and no small ambition, of a sort.

I think that my father was the ideal of all the blacksmiths who ever lived. He was *the* blacksmith. A man with a calm, square, honest face; very strong, very good-humored, with plenty of kindly interest in his neighbors' affairs, and a most accurate memory for them. He was not only a most excellent tradesman, but he possessed those social qualities which are so necessary in a blacksmith, to a very high degree; for in our rank in life the blacksmith is a very important person indeed. He is owner of the very best gossip-station, after the bar of the public-house: and, consequently, if he be a good fellow (as he is pretty certain to be, though this may be partiality on my part), he is a man more often referred to, and consulted with, than the publican; for this reason: that the *married women* are jealous of the publican, and not so of the blacksmith. As for my father, he was umpire of the buildings, — the stopper of fights, and, sometimes, even the healer of matrimonial differences.

More than once I have known a couple come and "have it out" in my father's shop. Sometimes, during my apprenticeship, my father would send me out of the way on these occasions; would say to me, for instance, "Hallo, old man, here 's Bob Chittle and his missis a-coming; cut away and help mother a bit." But at other times he would not consider it necessary for me to go, and so I used to stay, and hear it all. The woman invariably began; the man confined himself mostly to sulky contradictions.

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My father, and I, and the men, went on with our work; my father would throw in a soothing word wherever he could, until the woman began to cry; upon which my father, in a low, confidential growl, addressing the man as "old chap," would persuade him to go and make it up with her. And he and she, having come there for no other purpose, would do so.

My mother never assisted at this sort of scenes, whether serious or trifling. She utterly ignored the shop at such times, and was preternaturally busy in the house among her pots, and pans, and children, ostentatiously singing. When it was all over she used accidentally to catch sight of the couple, and be for one moment stricken dumb with amazement, and then burst into voluble welcome. She was supposed to know nothing at all about what had passed. Sweet mother! thy arts were simple enough.

She was a very tall woman, with square, large features, who had never, I think, been handsome. When I begin my story my mother was already the mother of nine children, and I, the eldest, was fifteen; so, if she had at any time had any beauty, it must have vanished long before; but she was handsome enough for us. When she was dressed for church, in all the colors of the rainbow, in a style which would have driven Jane Clarke out of her mind, she was always inspected by the whole family before she started, and pronounced satisfactory. And at dinner my sister Emma would perhaps say, "Law! mother did look so beautiful in church this morning; you never!"

She had a hard time of it with us. The family specialities were health, good humor, and vivacity; somewhat too much of the last among the junior members. I, Joe, and Emma, might be trusted, but all the rest were terrible pickles; the most unluckly children I ever saw. Whenever I was at work with father, and we saw a crowd coming round the corner, he would say, "Cut away, old chap, and see who it is"; for we knew it must either be one of our own little ones, or a young Chittle. If it was one of the young Chittles, I used to hold up my hand and whistle, and father used to go on with his work. But if I was silent, and in that way let father know that it was one of our own little ones, he would begin to roar out, and want to know which it was, and what he 'd been up to. To which I would have to roar in return (I give you an instance only, out of many such) that it was Fred. That he had fallen off a barge under Battersea Bridge. Had been picked out by young Tom Cole. Said he liked it. Or that it was Eliza. Had wedged her head into a gas-pipe. Been took out black in the face. Said Billy Chittle had told her she was n't game to it. These were the sort of things I had to roar out to my father, while I had the delinquent in my arms, and was carrying him or her indoors to moth-

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er; the delinquent being in a triumphant frame of mind, evidently under the impression that he had distinguished himself, and added another flower to the chaplet of the family honor.

I never saw my mother out of temper. On these, and other occasions, she would say that, Lord 'a mercy! no woman ever was teased and plagued with her children as she was (and there was a degree of truth in that). That she did n't know what would become of them (which was to a certain extent true also); that she hoped none of them would come to a bad end (in which hope I sincerely joined); and that finally, she thought that if some of them were well shook, and put to bed, it would do 'em a deal of good, and that their Emma would never love them any more. But they never cared for this sort of thing. They were not a bit afraid of mother. They were never shook; their Emma continued to love them; and, as for being put to bed, they never thought of such a thing happening to them, until they heard the rattle of brother Joe's crutch on the floor, when he came home from the night-school.

Brother Joe's crutch. Yes; our Joe was a cripple. With poor Joe, that restless vivacity to which I have called your attention above, had ended very sadly. He was one of the finest children ever seen; but, when only three years old, poor Joe stole away, and climbed up a ladder, — he slipped, when some seven or eight feet from the ground, and fell on his back, doubling one of his legs under him. The little soul fluttered between earth and heaven for some time, but at last determined to stay with us. All that science, skill, and devotion could do, was done for him at St. George's Hospital; but poor Joe was a hunchback, with one leg longer than the other, but with the limbs of a giant, and the face of a Byron.

It is a great cause of thankfulness to me, when I think that Joe inherited the gentle, patient temper of his father and mother. Even when a mere boy, I began dimly to understand that it was fortunate that Joe was good-tempered. When I and the other boys would be at rounders, and he would be looking intently and eagerly on, with his fingers twitching with nervous anxiety to get hold of the stick, shouting now to one, and now to another, by name, and now making short runs, in his excitement, on his crutch; at such times, I say, it used to come into my boy's head, that it was as well that Joe was a good-tempered fellow; and this conviction grew on me year by year, as I watched with pride and awe the great intellect unfolding, and the mighty restless ambition soaring higher and higher. Yes, it was well that Joe had learned to love in his childhood.

Joe's unfailing good humor, combined with his affliction, had a wonderful influence on us for good. His misfortune being so

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fearfully greater than any of our petty vexations, and his good temper being so much more unfailing than ours, he was there continually among us as an example, — an example which it was impossible not to follow to some extent; even if one had not had an angel to point to it for us.

For, in the sense of being a messenger of good, certainly my sister Emma was an angel. She was a year younger than me. She was very *handsome*, not very pretty, made on a large model like my mother, but with fewer angles. Perhaps the most noticeable thing about her was her voice. Whether the tone of it was natural, or whether it had acquired that tone from being used almost exclusively in cooing to, and soothing, children, I cannot say; but there was no shrillness in it: it was perfectly, nay singularly clear; but there was not a sharp note in the whole of sweet Emma's gamut.

She was very much devoted to all of us; but towards Joe her devotion was intensified. I do not assert — because I do not believe — that she loved him better than the rest of us, but from an early age she simply *devoted* herself to him. I did not see it at first. The first hint of it which I got was in the first year of my apprenticeship. I had come in to tea, and father had relieved me in the shop, and all our little ones had done tea and were talking nonsense, at which I began to assist. We were talking about who each of us was to marry, and what we would have for dinner on the auspicious occasion. It was arranged that I was to marry Miss de Bracy, from the Victoria Theatre, and we were to have sprats and gin-and-water; and that such a one was to marry such a one; but on one thing the little ones were agreed, that Emma was to marry Joe. When they cried out this, she raised her eyes to mine for an instant, and dropped them again with a smile. I wondered why then, but I know now.

On my fifteenth birthday I was bound to my father. I think that was nearly the happiest day of my life. The whole family was in a state of rampant pride about it. I am sure I don't know what there was to be proud of, but proud we were. Joe sat staring at me with his bright eyes, every now and then giving a sniff of profound satisfaction, or pegging out in a restless manner for a short expedition into the court. Emma remarked several times, "Lawk, only just to think about Jim!" And my younger brothers and sisters kept on saying to all their acquaintances in the street, "Our Jim is bound to father," with such a very triumphant air, that the other children resented it, and Sally Agar said something so disparaging of the blacksmith-trade in general, that our Eliza gave her a good shove; upon which Jane Agar, the elder sister, shook our Eliza, and, when Emma came out to the rescue, put her tongue out at her; which had

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such an effect on Emma's gentle spirit that she gave up the contest at once, and went in-doors in tears, and for the rest of the day told every friend she met, "Lawk, there, if that Jane Agar did n't take and put her tongue out at me, because their Sally shoved our Eliza, and I took and told her she had n't ought to do it": and they retailed it to other girls again; and at last it was known all over the buildings that Jane had gone and put her tongue out at Emma Burton; and it was unanimously voted that she ought to be ashamed of herself.

We were simple folk, easily made happy, even by seeing that the other girls were fond of our sister. But there was another source of happiness to us on that auspicious fifteenth birthday of mine. That day week we were to move into the great house.

Our present home was a very poor place, only a six-roomed house; and that, with nine children and another apprentice besides myself, was intolerable. Any time this year past we had seen that it was necessary to move: but there had been one hitch to our doing so, — there was no house to move into, except into a very large house which stood by itself, as it were fronting the buildings opposite our forge; which contained twenty-five rooms, some of them very large, and which was called by us, indifferently, Church Place, or Queen Elizabeth's Palace.

It had been in reality the palace of the young Earl of Essex, a very large three-storied house of old brick, with stone-mullioned windows and door-ways. Many of the windows were blind, bricked up at different times as the house descended in the social scale. The roof was singularly high, hanging somewhat far over a rich cornice, and in that roof there was a single large dormer-window at the north end.

The house had now been empty for some time, and it had always had a great attraction for us children. In the first place it was empty; in the second place, it had been inhabited by real princesses; and in the third, there was a ghost, who used to show a light in the aforementioned dormer-window the first Friday in every month.

On the summer's evenings we had been used to see it towering aloft between us and the setting sun, which filled the great room on the first floor with light, some rays of which came through into our narrow street. Mother had actually once been up in that room, and had looked out of the window westward, and seen the trees of Chelsea farm (now Cremorne Gardens). What a room that would be to play in! Joe pegged down the back-yard and back again with excitement, when he thought of it. We were going to live there, and father was going to let all the upper part in lodgings, and Cousin Reuben ——

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CHAPTER III.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: COUSIN REUBEN.

And Cousin Reuben had applied for lodgings from the very moment he heard of our move, and was actually coming to live with us. Was this as satisfactory as all the rest of it? Why, no. And that is why I made that pause at the end of the last chapter. We had noticed that a shade had passed over our father's face; and, we being simple and affectionate people, that shade had been reflected on ours, though we hardly knew why.

For our Cousin Reuben was a great favorite with all of us. He had been apprenticed to a waterman, but had won his coat and freedom a few months before this. He was a merry, slangy, dapper fellow, about seventeen, always to be found at street-corners, with his hands in his pockets, talking loud. We had been very proud of his victory; it was the talk of all the water-side; he rowed in such perfect form, and with such wonderful rapidity. The sporting papers took him up. He was matched at some public-house to row against somebody else for some money. He won it, but there was a dispute about it, and the sporting papers had leading articles thereon. But the more famous Reuben became, the more my father's face clouded when he spoke of him.

That birthday-night I was sleepily going up to bed, when my father stopped me by saying, "Old man, you and me must have a talk," whereupon my mother departed. "Jim," said he, as soon as she was gone, "did you ever hear anything about your cousin Reuben's father?"

I said quickly, "No; but I had often thought it curious that we had never heard anything of him."

"The time is come, my boy, when you must know as much as I do. It is a bitter thing to have to tell you; but you are old enough to share the family troubles." And I heard the following story:—

Samuel Burton had been a distant cousin of my father's. When about twelve years old, he had expressed a wish to go into service, and his friends had got for him a place as page or steward-room boy, in the family of an opulent gentleman.

At the time of his going there the heir of the house was a mere infant. As time went on, his father, anxious for him to escape the contaminations of a public school, sent him to a highly ex-

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pensive private tutor; and the boy selected Samuel Burton, his favorite, to accompany him as his valet.

The father had been anxious that his boy should escape the contamination of a public school, — the more so, because, at the age of thirteen, he was a very difficult and somewhat vicious boy. The father took the greatest care, and made every possible inquiry. The Rev. Mr. Easy was a man of high classical attainments, and unblemished character. There were only two other pupils, both of the most respectable rank in life, — one, the son and heir of Sir James Mottesfont; the other, son of the great city man, Mr. Peters. Nothing could be more satisfactory. Alas! the poor father in avoiding Charybdis had run against Scylla. In avoiding the diluted vice of a public school, he had sent his son into a perfectly undiluted atmosphere of it. Young Mottesfont was an irreclaimable vicious idiot, and Peters had been sent away from a public school for drunkenness. In four years' time our young gentleman "was finished," and was sent to travel with a tutor, keeping his old servant, Samuel Burton (who had learned something also), and began a career of reckless debauchery of all kinds. After two years he was angrily recalled by his father. Not very long after his return Samuel Burton married (here my father's face grew darker still). Hitherto his character, through all his master's excesses, had been most blameless. The young gentleman's father had conceived a great respect for the young man, and was glad that his wild son should have so staid and respectable a servant willing to stay with him.

A year after Samuel was married a grand crash came. The young gentleman, still a minor, was found to be awfully in debt, to have been raising money most recklessly, to have been buying jewellery and selling it again. His creditors, banding themselves together, refused to accept the plea of minority; two of their number threatened to prosecute for swindling if their claims were not settled in full. An arrangement was come to for six thousand pounds, and the young gentleman was allowanced with two hundred a year and sent abroad.

Samuel Burton, seeing that an end was come to a system of plunder which he had carried on at his young master's expense, came out in his true colors. He robbed the house of money and valuables to the amount of thirteen hundred pounds, and disappeared, — utterly and entirely disappeared, — leaving his wife and child to the mercy of my father.

This was my father's account of his disappearance. He concealed from me the fact that Samuel Burton had been arrested and transported for fourteen years.

The poor mother exerted herself as well as she was able; but she had been brought up soft-handed, and could do but little.

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When Reuben was about ten she died; my father took the boy home, and ultimately apprenticed him to a waterman.

"And now, my boy, you see why I am anxious about Reuben's coming to live with us. He comes of bad blood on both sides; and his father is, for aught I know, still alive. Reuben ain't going on as I could wish. I don't say anything against those as row races, or run races, or ride races; I only know it ain't my way, and I don't want it to be. There 's too much pot'us about it for our sort, my boy; so you see I don't want him and his lot here on that account. And then he is a dapper little chap; and our Emma is very pretty and sweet, and there may be mischief there again. Still, I can't refuse him. I thought I was doing a kind thing to a fatherless lad in calling him cousin, but I almost wish I had n't now. So I say to you, keep him at a distance. Don't let him get too intimate in our part of the house. Good night, old man."

"Where are you going to put him, father?"

"As far off as I can," said my father. "In the big room at the top of the house."

"In the ghost's room?" said I. And I went to bed, and dreamt of Reuben being woke in the night by a little old lady in gray-shot silk and black mittens, who came and sat on his bed and knitted at him. For, when my mother was confined with Fred, Mrs. Quickly was in attendance, and told us of such an old lady in the attic aloft there, and had confirmed her story by an appeal to Miss Tearsheet, then in seclusion, in consequence of a man having been beaten to death by Mr. Pistol and others. We were very few doors from Alsatia in those times!

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY SEES SNAKES AND OTHER VERMIN.

It was a hard hit in a tender place for the Colonial Secretary. He had started in life as the younger son of a Worcestershire squire, and had fought his way, inch by inch, up to fame, honor, and wealth. He was shrewd, careful enough of the main chance, and very ambitious; but, besides this, he was a good-hearted, affectionate fellow; and one of his objects of ambition had been to have a quiet and refined home, wherein he might end his days in honor, presided over by a wife who was in every way worthy of him. Perhaps he had been too much engaged in money-

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making, perhaps he had plunged too fiercely into politics, perhaps he had never found a woman who exactly suited him; but so it was, — he had postponed his domestic scheme to his other schemes, until he was two-and-forty, and might have postponed it longer, had he not met Agnes Neville, at a geological pic-nic, in the crater of Necnicabarla. Here was everything to be wished for: beauty, high breeding, sweet temper, and the highest connection. Four of her beautiful sisters had married before her, every one of them to one of the best-bred and richest squatters in that wealthy colony. Mrs. Morton of Jip Jip; Mrs. Hill of Macandemdah; the Honorable Mrs. Packenham of Langi Cal Cal; and lastly, the beautiful and witty Mrs. Somerton of Lal Lal and Pywheitjork.* He fell in love with Miss Neville at once; their marriage was delayed, principally on account of troublesome political reasons, for six months, and in that time he had got to love, like a brother, her little sister, Gerty Neville, and the last and most beautiful of the six beautiful sisters. Even before he was married, he and Agnes had laid out all sorts of plans for her future settlement. He had even a scheme for taking her to Paris, getting her properly dressed there, and pitching her into the London season, under the auspices of his mother, as a gauntlet to English beauty.

It was a hard hit for him. He had always been so especially hard on a certain kind of young English gentleman, who has sailed too close to the wind at home, and who comes to the colony to be whitewashed. He had fulminated against that sort of thing so strongly. From his place in the House he had denounced it time after time. That his colony, his own colony, which he had helped to make, was to become a sewer or sink for all the rubbish of the Old Country! How he had protested against and denounced that principle, whether applied to male or female emigrants; and now Gerty was proposing to marry a man, whom he was very much inclined to quote as one of the most offensive examples of it.

And another provoking part of the business was, that he would have little or no sympathy. The colony would say that the youngest Miss Neville had made a great catch, and married better than any of her sisters. The fellow would be a baronet with £10,000 a year. There was a certain consolation in that, — a considerable deal of consolation; if it had not been that the Secretary loved her, that might have made him tolerably contented with her lot. But he loved her; and the man, were he fifty baronets, was a low fellow of loose character; and it was very hot; and so the Secretary was discontented.

Very hot. The tide out, leaving a band of burning sand, a

* One would not dare to invent these names. They are all real.

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quarter of a mile broad, between sea and shore. Where he had struck the sea first, at Wooriallock Point, the current, pouring seaward off the spit of sand, had knocked up a trifling surf, which chafed and leaped in tiny waves, and looked crisp, and cool, and aerated. But, now he was in the lone bight of the bay, the sea was perfectly smooth and oily, deadly silent and calm, under the blazing sun. The water did not break upon the sand, but only now and then sneaked up a few feet with a lazy whisper. Before him, for twelve miles or more, were the long, level yellow sands, without one single break as far as the eye could reach; on his right the glassy sea, gleaming under the background of a heavy, slow-sailing thunder-cloud; and on his left the low wall of dark evergreen shrubs, which grew densely to the looser and drier sands that lay piled in wind-heaps beyond the reach of the surf.

Once his horse shied; it was at a black snake, which had crept down to bathe, and which raised its horrible wicked head from out its coils and hissed at him as he went by. Another time he heard a strange rippling noise, coming from the glassy, surfless sea on his right. It was made by a shark, which, coming swiftly, to all appearance, from under the dark thunder-cloud, headed shoreward, making the spray fly in a tiny fountain from his back-fin, which was visible above the surface. As he came on, the smaller fish, snappers and such like, hurled themselves out of water in hundreds, making the sea alive for one instant; but after that the shark, and the invisible fish he was in pursuit of, sped seaward again; the ripple they had made died out on the face of the water, and the water in the bay was calm, still, and desolate once more.

Intolerably lonely. He pushed his horse into a canter, to make a breeze for himself which the heavens denied him. Still only the long weary stretch of sand, the sea on the right, and the low evergreens on the left.

But now far, far ahead, a solitary dot upon the edge of the gleaming water, which, as the good horse threw the ground behind him, grew larger and larger. Yes, it *was* a man who toiled steadily on in the same direction the Secretary was going, — a man who had his trousers off, and was walking bare-legged on the edge of the sea to cool his feet; a man who looked round from time to time, as if to see who was the horseman behind him.

The Secretary reined up beside him with a cheery "Good day," and the man respectfully returned the salutation. The Secretary recognized his man in an instant, but held his tongue.

He was a tall, narrow-shouldered man, who might have been forty or might have been sixty; as with most other convicts, his age was a profound mystery. You could see that he had been

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originally what some people, hasty observers, would call a good-looking young man, and was even now what those same hasty observers would call a good-looking middle-aged man. His hair was gray, and he had that wonderfully clear dark-brown complexion which one sees so continually among old convicts who have been much in the bush. His forehead was high and bald, and his nose was very long, delicate, and aquiline, — so much was in his favor; but then, — why, all the lower part of his face, upper lip, mouth, lower lip and all, were pinched up in a heap under the long nose. When I read "Little Dorrit," I was pleased to find that Mr. Dickens was describing in the person of M. Rigaud one of our commonest types of convict face, but Frenchified and wearing a mustache, and was pleased also to see that, with his wonderfully close observation, he had not committed the mistake of making his man a brave and violent villain, but merely a cunning one.

The Secretary looked down on the bald head and the Satanic eyebrows, which ran down from high above the level of the man's ears and nearly met above his great transparent hook-nose, and said to himself, "Well, you are a more ill-looking scoundrel than I thought you the other day, though you did look a tolerable rogue then."

The man saw that the Secretary had recognized him, and the Secretary saw that he saw it; but they both ignored the fact. It was so lonely on these long sands, that the Secretary looked on this particular scoundrel as if he were a rather interesting book which he had picked up, and which would beguile the way.

"Hot day, my man."

"Very hot, your honor; but if that thunder-cloud will work up to us from the west, we shall have the south wind up in the tail of it, as cold as ice. Your honor will excuse my walking like this. I looked round and saw you had no ladies with you."

Not at all an unpleasant or coarse voice. A rather pleasing voice, belonging to a person who had mixed with well-bred people at some time or another.

"By Jove," said the Secretary, "don't apologize my man. I rather envy you. But look out for the snakes. I have seen two on the edge of the salt water; you must be careful with your bare feet."

"I saw the two you speak of, sir, a hundred yards off. I have a singularly quick eye. It is possible, your honor, that if I had been transported a dozen years earlier I might have made a good bushman. I was too effeminately bred also, Mr. Secretary. I was spoilt too young by *your* class, Mr. Secretary, or I might have developed into a bolder and more terrible rogue than I am."

"What a clever dog it is!" thought the Secretary. "Know-

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ing that he can't take me in, and yet trying to do it through a mere instinct of deceit, which has become part of his nature. And his instinct shows him that this careless frankness was the most likely dodge to me, who know everything, and more. By gad, it is a wonderful rogue!"

He thought this, but he said: "Fiddledeedee about terrible rogues. You are clear now; why don't you mend your ways, man? Confound it, why don't you mend your ways?"

"I am going to," said the other. "Not, Mr. Colonial Secretary, because I am a bit a less rogue than before, but because it will pay. Catch me tripping again, Mr. Oxton, and hang me."

"I say," said the Secretary; "you mus'n't commit yourself, you know."

"Commit myself!" said the man, with a sneer; "commit myself to *you!* Have n't I been confidential with you? Don't I know that every word I have said to you in confidence is sacred? Don't I know that what you choose to call your honor will prevent your using one word of any private conversation against me? Have n't I been brought up among such as you? Have n't I been debauched and ruined by such as you? Commit myself! I know and despise your class too well to commit myself. You *dare n't* use one word I have said against me. Such as I have the pull of you there. You dare n't, for your honor's sake."

And, as he turned his angry face upon the Secretary, he looked so much more fiendish than the snake, and so much more savage than the shark, that the Secretary rode on, saying, "Well, my man, I am sorry I said anything to offend you"; and, as he rode on, leaving the solitary figure toiling on behind him, he thought somewhat like this:

"Curious cattle, these convicts! Even the most refined of them get at times defiant and insolent, in their way. What a terrible rogue this fellow is! He saw I recognized him from the first. I hate a convict who turns Queen's evidence. I wonder where he is going. I wish I could turn him over the border. I hate having convicts loose in my little colony. It is an infernal nuisance being so close to a penal settlement; but there is no help for it. I wonder where that rogue is making for; I wish he would make for Sydney. Where can he be going?"

One cannot help wondering what the Secretary would have said had he known, as we do, that this desperate rogue was bound on exactly the same errand as himself. That is to say, to foregather with Mr. George Hillyar, the man who was to be a baronet, and have £10,000 a year, and who, God help us, was to marry Gerty Neville.

"Let me see," said the Secretary. "That fellow's real name came out on his trial. What was it? Those things are worth

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remembering. Samuel Barker, — no, it was n't Barker, because that's the name of the Cape Wilberforce people. Rippon, that was the name; no, it was n't. What is his name? Ah! Rippon and — Rippon and Burton. Ah! for the man's name was Samuel Burton."

CHAPTER V.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE GHOST'S ROOM IS INVADED, AND JAMES PUTS HIS FOOT THROUGH THE FLOOR.

In due time, — that is to say, a fortnight after my fifteenth birthday, — we moved into the new house. It was eight o'clock on a bright summer's morning when my father got the key from Mr. Long, unlocked the gate in the broken palings which surrounded the house, and passed into the yard, surrounded by his whole awe-stricken family.

There was no discovery made in the yard. It was commonplace. A square flagged space, with a broken water-butt in one corner under an old-fashioned leaden gargoyle. There was also a grindstone, and some odd bits of timber which lay about near the pump, which was nearly grown up with nettles and rye-grass. In front of me, as I stood in the yard, the great house rose, flushed with the red blaze of the morning sun; behind were the family, — Joe leaning on his crutch, with his great eyes staring out of his head in eager curiosity; after him the group of children, clustered round Emma, who carried in her arms my brother Fred, a large-headed stolid child of two, who was chronically black and blue in every available part of his person with accidents, and who was, even now, evidently waiting for an opportunity to distinguish himself in that line.

Joe had not long before made acquaintance with kind old Mr. Faulkner, who had coached him up in antiquities of the house; and Joe had told me everything. We boys fully expected to find Lord Essex's helmet lying on the stairs, or Queen Elizabeth's glove in the passage. So when father opened the great panelled door, and went into the dark entry, we pushed in after him, staring in all directions, expecting to see something or another strange; in which we were disappointed. There was nothing more strange than a large entrance-hall, a broad staircase, with large balustrades, somewhat rickety and out of the perpendicular, winding up one side of it to the floor above, and a large mullioned

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window half-way up. Our first difficulty arose from Frank, my youngest brother but one, declining to enter the house, on the grounds that Shadrach was hiding in the cellar. This difficulty being overcome, we children, leaving father and mother to inspect the ground-floor, pushed up stairs in a body to examine the delectable regions above, where you could look out of window, over Shepherd's nursery-ground, and see the real trees waving in the west.

On reaching the first floor, my youngest brother, Fred, so to speak, inaugurated, or opened for public traffic, the staircase, by falling down it from the top to bottom, and being picked up black in the face, with all the skin off his elbows and knees. Our next hitch was with Frank, who refused to go any further because Abednego was in the cupboard. Emma had to sit down on the landing, and explain to him that the three holy children were not, as Frank had erroneously gathered from their names, ghosts who caught hold of your legs through the banisters as you went up stairs, or burst suddenly upon you out of closets; but respectable men, who had been dead, lawk-a-mercy, ever so long. Joe and I left her, combating, somewhat unsuccessfully, a theory that Meshech was at that present speaking up the chimney, and would immediately appear, in a cloud of soot, and frighten us all to death; and went on to examine the house.

And really we went on with something like awe upon us. There was no doubt that we were treading on the very same boards which had been trodden, often enough, by the statesmen and dandies of Queen Elizabeth's Court, and most certainly by the mighty woman herself. Joe, devourer of books, had, with Mr. Faulkner's assistance, made out the history of the house; and he had communicated his enthusiasm even to me, the poor simple blacksmith's boy. So when we, too, went into the great room on the first floor, even I, stupid lad, cast my eyes eagerly around to see whether anything remained of the splendor of the grand old court, of which I had heard from Joe.

Nothing. Not a bit of furniture. Three broad windows, which looked westward. A broad extent of shaky floor, an immense fire-place, and over it a yellow dingy old sampler, under a broken glass, hanging all on one side on a rusty nail.

Joe pounced upon this at once, and devoured it. "Oh, Jim! Jim!" he said to me, "just look at this. I wonder who she was"?

"There 's her name to it, old man," I answered. "I expect that name 's hern, ain't it? For," I said hesitatingly, seeing that Joe was excited about it, and feeling that I ought to be so myself, though not knowing why, — "for, old man, if they 'd forged her name, maybe they 'd have done it in another colored worsted."

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This bringing forth no response, I felt that I was not up to the occasion; I proceeded to say that worsteds were uncommon hard to match, which ask our Emma, when Joe interrupted me.

"I don't mean that, Jim. I mean, what was her history. Did she write it herself, or who wrote it for her? What a strange voice from the grave it is. Age eighteen; date 1686; her name Alice Hillyar. And then underneath, in black, one of her beautiful sisters has worked, 'She dyed 3d December, that yeare.' She is dead, Jim, many a weary year agone, and she did this when she was eighteen years old. If one could only know her history, eh? She was a lady. Ladies made these common samplers in those times. See, here is Emma. Emma, dear, see what I have found. Take and read it out to Jim."

Emma, standing in the middle of the deserted room, with the morning sunlight on her face, and with the rosy children clustering round her, read it out to us. She, so young, so beautiful, so tender and devoted, stood there, and read out to us the words of a girl, perhaps as good and as devoted as she was, who had died a hundred and fifty years before. Even I, dull boy as I was, felt there was something strange and out-of-the-way in hearing the living girl reading aloud the words of the girl who had died so long ago. I thought of it then; I thought of it years after, when Joe and I sat watching a dim blue promontory for two white sails which should have come plunging round before the full south wind.

It was but poor doggrel that Emma read out to us. First came the letters of the alphabet; then the numbers; then a house and some fir-trees; then: —

"Weep not, sweet friends, my early doom.
Lay not fresh flowers upon my tomb;
But elder sour and briony,
And yew bough broken from the tree
My sisters kind and beautiful!
My brothers brave and dutiful!
My mother deare, beat not thy breast,
Thy hunchbacked daughter is at rest.
See, friends, I am not loath to go;
My Lord will take me, that I know."

Poor as it was, it pleased Joe; and as I had a profound belief in Joe's good taste, I was pleased also. I thought it somewhat in the tombstone line myself, and fell into the mistake of supposing that one was to admire it on critical, rather than on sentimental grounds. Joe hung it up over his bed, and used to sit up in the night and tell me stories about the young lady, whom he made a clothes-peg on which he hung every fancy of his brain.

He took his yellow sampler to kind old Mr. Faulkner, who told him that our new house, Church Place, had been the family place of the Hillyars at the close of the seventeenth century.

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And then the old man put on his hat, took his stick, called his big dog, and, taking Joe by the hand, led him to that part of the old church burial-ground which lies next the river; and there he showed him her grave. She lay in that fresh breezy corner which overlooks the flashing busy river, all alone. "Alice Hillyar; born 1668, died 1686." Her beautiful sisters lay elsewhere, and the brave brothers also; though, by a beautiful fiction, they were all represented on the family tomb in the chancel, kneeling one behind the other. It grew to be a favorite place with Joe, this grave of the hunchbacked girl, which overlooked the tide; and Emma would sit with him there sometimes. And then came one and joined them, and talked soft and low to Emma, whose foot would often dally with the letters of his own surname on the worn old stone.

The big room quite came up to our expectations. We examined all the other rooms on the same floor; then we examined the floor above; and, lastly, Joe said:

"Jim, are you afraid to go up into the ghost's room?"

"N — no," I said; "I don't mind in the day time."

"When Rube comes," said Joe, "we sha'n't be let to it; so now or never."

We went up very silently. The door was ajar, and we peeped in. It was nearly bare and empty, with only a little nameless lumber lying in one corner. It was high for an attic, in consequence of the high pitch of the roof, and not dark, though there was but one window to it; this window being a very large dormer, taking up nearly half the narrow end of the room. The ceiling was, of course, lean-to, but at a slighter angle to the floor than is usual.

But what struck us immediately was, that this room, long as it was, did not take up the whole of the attic story. And, looking towards the darker end of the room, we thought we could make out a door. We were afraid to go near it, for it would not have been very pleasant to have it opened suddenly, and for a little old lady, in gray-shot silk and black mittens, to come popping out on you. We, however, treated the door with great suspicion, and I kept watch on it while Joe looked out of window.

When it came to my turn to look out of window, Joe kept watch. I looked right down on the top of the trees in the Rectory garden; beyond the Rectory I could see the new tavern, the Cadogan Arms, and away to the northeast St. Luke's Church. It was a pleasant thing to look, as it were, down the chimneys of the Black Lion, and over them into the Rectory garden. The long walk of pollard limes, the giant acacias, and the little glimpse of the lawn between the boughs, was quite a new sight to me. I was enjoying the view, when Joe said: —

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"Can you see the Cadogan Arms?"

"Yes."

"I wonder what the Earl of Essex would have thought if —"

At this moment there was a rustling of silk in the dark end of the room, and we both, as the Yankees say, "up stick" and bolted. Even in my terror I am glad to remember that I let Joe go first, though he could get along with his crutch pretty nearly as fast as I could. We got down stairs as quick as possible, and burst in on the family, with the somewhat premature intelligence, that we had turned out the ghost, and that she was, at that present moment, coming down stairs in gray-shot silk and black mittens.

There was an immediate rush of the younger ones towards my mother and Emma, about whom they clustered like bees. Meanwhile my father stepped across to the shop for a trifle of a striking-hammer, weight eighteen pounds, and, telling me to follow him, went up stairs. I obeyed, in the first place, because his word was law to me, and, in the second, because in his company I should not have cared one halfpenny for a whole regiment of old ladies in gray silk. We went up stairs rapidly, and I followed him into the dark part of the room.

We were right in supposing that we had seen a door. There it was, hasped — or, as my father said, hapsed — up and covered with cobwebs. After two or three blows from the hammer, it came open, and we went in.

The room we entered was nearly as large as the other, but dark, save for a hole in the roof. In one corner was an old tressel bed, and at its head a tattered curtain, which rustled in the wind, and accounted for our late panic. I was just beginning to laugh at this, when I gave a cry of terror, for my right foot had gone clean through the boards.

My father pulled me out laughing; but I had hurt my knee, and had to sit down. My father knelt down to look at it; when he had done so, he looked at the hole I had made.

"An ugly hole in the boards, old man; we must tell Rube about it, or he'll break his leg, may be. What a depth there is between the floor and the ceiling below!" he said, feeling with his hammer; "I never did, surely."

After which he carried me down stairs, for I had hurt my knee somewhat severely, and did not get to work for a week or more.

When father made his appearance among the family, carrying me in his arms, there was a wild cry from the assembled children. My mother requested Emma to put the door-key down her back; and then, seeing that I was really hurt, said that she felt rather better, and that Emma need n't.

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Some one took me from my father, and said, in a pleasant, cheery voice, —

"Hallo! here's our Jim been a-trotting on the loose stones without his knee-caps. Hold up, old chap, and don't cry; I'll run round to the infant-school for a pitch-plaster, and call at the doctor's shop as I go for the fire-engine. That's about our little game, unless you think it necessary for me to order a marvel tomb at the greengrocer's. Not a-going to die this bout? I thought as much."

I laughed. We always laughed at Reuben, — a sort of small master in the art of cockney chaff; which chaff consisted in putting together a long string of incongruities in a smart, jerky tone of voice. This, combined with consummate impudence; a code of honor which, though somewhat peculiar, is rarely violated; a reckless, though persistent, courage; and, generally speaking, a fine physique, are those better qualities of the Londoner ("cockney," as those call him who don't care for two black eyes, *et cetera*), which make him, in rough company, more respected and "let alone" than any other class of man with whom I am acquainted. The worst point in his character, the point which spoils him, is his distrust for high motives. His horizon is too narrow. You cannot get him on any terms to allow the existence of high motives in others. And, where he himself does noble and generous things (as he does often enough, to my knowledge), he hates being taxed with them, and invariably tries to palliate them by imputing low motives to himself. If one wanted to be fanciful, one would say that the descendant of the old London 'prentice had inherited his grandsires' distrust for the clergy and the aristocracy, who were to the city folk, not so intimate with them as the country folk, the representatives of lofty profession and imperfect practice. However this may be, your Londoner's chief fault, in the present day, is his distrust of pretensions to religion and chivalrous feeling. He can be chivalrous and religious at times; but you must hold your tongue about it.

Reuben was an average specimen of a town-bred lad; he had all their virtues and vices *in petto*. He was a gentle, good-humored lit[illegible]llow, very clever, very brave, very kind-hearted, very hand[illegible] in a way, with a flat-sided head and regular features. The fault as regarded his physical beauty, was, that he was always "making faces," — "shaving," as my father used to call it. He never could keep his mouth still. He was always biting his upper-lip or his under-lip, or chewing a straw, or spitting in an unnecessary manner. If he could have set that mouth into a good round No, on one or two occasions, and kept it so, it would have been better for all of us.

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CHAPTER VI.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE PRELIMINARIES TO THE MOMENTOUS EXPEDITION TO STANLAKE.

THAT same year also, Joe and I made a new acquaintance, in this manner:—

It had become evident to me, who had watched Joe so long, that his lameness was to some slight extent on the mend. I began to LOTICE that, in the case of our getting into a fight in the street (no uncommon case among the Chelsea street-children, even in this improved age, as I am given to understand), and being driven to retreat, he began to make much better weather of it. I was pleased to find this, for nothing on earth could have prevented his following me at a certain distance to see how I was getting on. The first time I noticed a decided improvement was this. We (Church Street — Burtons, Chittles, Holmeses, Agers, &c.) were at hot feud with Danvers Street on the west side of us, and Lawrence Street on the east. Lawrence Street formed a junction with Danvers Street by Lombard Street; and so, when we went across the end of the space now called Paulton Square, we came suddenly on the enemy, three to one. The affair was short, but decisive. Everything that skill and valor could do was done, but it was useless. We fled silent and swift, and the enemy followed, howling. When round the first corner, to my astonishment, there was Joe, in the thick and press of the disordered ranks, with his crutch over his shoulder, getting along in a strange waddling way, but at a most respectable pace. The next moment my fellow-apprentice and I had him by his arms and hurried him along between us, until the pursuit ceased, the retreat stopped, and we were in safety.

I thought a great deal about this all the rest of the day. I began to see that, if it were possible to strengthen the poor lad's leg by gradual abandonment of the crutch, a much brighter future was before him. I determined to try.

"Joe, old fellow," I said, as soon as we were in bed, "have you got a story for us?"

"No," he said, "I have n't. I am thinking of something else, Jim."

"What about?"

"About the country. The country is here within three miles of us. I been asking Rube about it. He says he goes miles up

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the river into it in his lighter. Real country, you knows,—stiles, and foot-paths, and cows, and all of it. You and me has never seen it. Lets we go."

"But," I said, "what 's the good? That there crutch of yourn (that 's the way I used to talk in those old times) would prevent you getting there; and when you get there, old chap, you could n't get about. And, if the cows was to run after you, you could n't hook it over the gates and stiles, and such as you talks on. Therefore I ask you, What 's the good?"

"But the cows," urged Joe, "don't allus come rampaging at you, end on, do 'em?" (That is the way our orator used to speak at twelve years old.)

"Most times they does, I reckon," I replied, and turned myself over to sleep, almost afraid that I had already said too much "about that there crutch of hisn." I had become aware of the fact that crutches grew, ready made, in Shepherd's nursery-ground, in rows, like gooseberry-trees, and was on the eve of some fresh discoveries in the same line, when Joe awoke me.

"Jim," he said, "Rube's barge goes up on the tide to-morrow morning; let us see whether or no we can get a holiday and go?"

I assented, though I thought it doubtful that my father would give us leave. A month or so before he would have refused our request point-blank. Indeed, I should not have taken the trouble to ask him, but I had noticed that he had softened considerably towards Reuben. Reuben was so gentle and affectionate, and so respectful to my father and mother, that it was impossible not to yield in some way; and so Reuben was more and more often asked into our great kitchen on the ground-floor, when he was heard passing at night up to his solitary chamber in the roof.

At this time I began first to notice his singular devotion to my sister Emma,—a devotion which surprised me, as coming from such a feather-headed being as Reuben, who was by no means addicted to the softer emotions. I saw my father look rather uneasily at them sometimes, but his face soon brightened up again. It was only the admiring devotion of a man to a beautiful child. Reuben used to consult her on every possible occasion, and implicitly follow her advice. He told me once that, if you came to that, Emma had more head-piece than the whole lot of us put together.

My father gave us his leave; and at seven o'clock, on the sweet May morning, we started on our first fairy voyage up the river, in a barge full of gravel, navigated by the drunken one-eyed old man who had been Rube's master. It was on the whole the most perfectly delightful voyage I ever took. There is no craft in the world so comfortable as a coal barge. It has absolutely no motion whatever about it; you glide on so imperceptibly

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that the banks seem moving, and you seem still. Objects grow slowly on the eye, and then slowly fade again; and they say, "We have passed so and so," when a'l the time it would seem more natural to say, "So and so has passed us."

This was the first voyage Joe and I ever took together. We have made many voyages and journeys since, and have never found the way long while we were together; we shall have to make the last journey of all separate, but we shall meet again at the end of it.

O, glorious and memorable May-day! New wonders and pleasures at every turn. The river swept on smoothly without a ripple, past the trim villa lawns, all ablaze with flowers; and sometimes under tall dark trees, which bent down into the water, and left no shore. Joe was in a frantic state of anxiety to know all the different kinds of trees by sight, as he did by name. Reuben, the good-natured, was nearly as pleased as ourselves, and at last "finished" Joe by pointing out to him a tulip-tree in full bloom. Joe was silent after this. He kept recurring to this tulip-tree all the rest of the day at intervals; and the last words I heard that night, on dropping to sleep, were, "But after all there was nothing like the tulip-tree."

In one long reach, I remember, we heard something coming towards us on the water, with a measured rushing noise, very swiftly; and before we could say, What was it? it was by us, and gone far away. We had a glimpse of a brown thin-faced man, seated in a tiny outrigger, which creaked beneath the pressure of each mighty stroke, skimming over the water like a swallow, with easy undulations, so fast that the few swift runners on the bank were running their hardest. "Robert Coombes training," said Reuben, with bated breath; and we looked after the flying figure with awe and admiration, long after it was gone round the bend, and the gleaming ripples which he had made upon the oily river had died into stillness once more.

I hardly remember, to tell the truth, how far we went up with that tide; I think, as far as Kew. When the kedge was dropped, we all got into a boat, and went ashore to a public house. I remember perfectly well that I modestly asked the one-eyed old man, lately Rube's master, whether he would be pleased to take anything. He was pleased to put a name to gin and cloves, which he drank in our presence, to Joe's intense interest, who leant on his crutch, and stared at him intently with his great prominent eyes. Joe had heard of the old man's extraordinary performances when in liquor, and he evidently expected this particular dram to produce immediate and visible effects. He was disappointed. The old man assaulted nobody (he probably missed his wife), ordered another dram, wiped his

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mouth on the back of his hand, swore an ingenious oath perfectly new to the whole of his audience, lit his pipe, and sat down on a bench fronting the river.

Then, after a most affectionate farewell with Reuben, we turned to walk homewards, — Joe walking stoutly and bravely with his crutch over his shoulder. We enjoyed ourselves more on shore than on the river, for Joe said that there were wild tulips on Kew Green, and wanted to find some.* So we hunted for them, but without success. The tulip-tree at Fulham had given me incorrect ideas, and I steadily looked up into the limes and horse-chestnuts for them. Then we pushed on again, and at the turnpike on Barnes Common we took our first refreshment that day. We had some bread and treacle in a cotton pocket-handkerchief, and we bought two bottles of ginger-beer; and, for the first time in our lives, we "pic-nic'd." We sat on the short turf together, and ate our bread and treacle, and drank our ginger-beer.

Last year, when Joe and I came over to the Exhibition as Commissioners, we, as part of our duty, were invited to dine with one of the very greatest men in England. I sat between Mrs. Oxton and a Marchioness. And during dinner, in a low tone of voice, I told Mrs. Oxton this story about the bread and treacle, and the ginger-beer. And, to my surprise, and rather to my horror, as I must confess, Mrs. Oxton, speaking across me, told the whole story over again to the Marchioness, of whom I was in mortal terror. But, after this, nothing could be more genial and kind to me than was that terrible Marchioness; and in the drawing-room, I saw her, with my own eyes, go and tell the whole horrid truth to her husband, the Marquis. Whereupon he came over at once, and made much of me, in a corner. Their names, as I got them from Mrs. Oxton, were Lord and Lady Hainault.

Then we (on Putney Common twenty years ago) lay back and looked at the floating clouds, and Joe said, "Reuben is going to marry our Emma, and I am glad of it."

"But he mus'n't," I said; "it won't do."

"Why not"?

"Father won't hear on it, I tell you. Rube ain't going on well."

"Yes, he is now," said Joe, "since he's been seeing so much of Emma. Don't you notice, Jim? He has n't sworn a oath to-day. He has cut all that Cheyne Walk gang. I tell you she will make a man of him."

* Joe was, to a certain extent, right. The common Fritillaria *did* grow there — fifty years before Joe was born. He had seen the locality quoted in some old botany-book.

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"I tell you," I said, "father won't hear tell on it. Besides, she's only fourteen. And, also, who is fit to marry Emma? Go along with you."

And so we went along with us. And our first happy holiday came to an end by my falling asleep dog-tired at supper, with my head in my father's lap; while Joe, broad-awake, and highly excited, was telling them all about the tulip-tree. I was awakened by the screams incident to Fred having fallen triumphantly into the fire, off his chair, and having to be put out, — which being done, we went to bed.

After this first effort of ours, you might as well have tried to keep two stormy petrels at home in a gale of wind, as to keep Joe and me from rambling. My father "declined" — I can hardly use such a strong word as "refuse" about him — any more holidays; but he compromised the matter by allowing us to go an expedition into the country on Sunday afternoon, — providing always that we went to church in the morning with the rest of the family, — to which we submitted, though it cost us a deal in omnibuses.

And now I find that, before I can tell you the story of our new acquaintance in an artistic manner, I shall have to tell you what became of that old acquaintance of ours, — Joe's crutch; because, if we had not got rid of the one, we never should have made acquaintance with the other.

On every expedition we made into the country, Joe used his crutch less and less. I mean, used it less in a legitimate manner; though, indeed, we missed it in the end, as one does miss things one has got used to. He *used* it certainly to the last. I have known him dig out a mole with it; I have known him successfully defend himself against a dog with it in a farmyard at Roehampton; I have seen it flying up, time after time, into a horse-chestnut-tree, (we tried them roasted and boiled, with salt and without, but it would n't do,) until it lodged, and we wasted the whole Sabbath afternoon in pelting it down again. Latterly, I saw Joe do every sort and kind of thing with that crutch, except one. He never used it to walk with. Once he broke it short in two getting over a stile; and my father sent it to the umbrella-mender's and had it put together at a vast expense with a ferrule, and kept Joe from school till it was done. I saw that the thing was useless long before the rest of the family. But, at last, the end of it came, and the old familiar sound of it was heard no more.

One Sunday afternoon we got away as far as Penge Wood, where the Crystal Palace now stands; and in a field, between that and Norwood, we found mushrooms, and filled a handkerchief with them. When we were coming home through Batter-

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sea, we sat down on a bank to see if any of them were broken; after which we got up and walked home again. And then and there Joe forgot his crutch, and left it behind him on the bank, and we never saw it any more, but walked home very fast for fear we should be late for supper. That was the last of the crutch, unless the one Joe saw in the marine storekeeper's in Battersea was the same one, which you may believe or not as you like. All I know is, that he never got a new one, and has not done so to this day.

We burst in with our mushrooms. Father and mother had waited for us, and were gone to bed; Emma was sitting up for us, with Harry (of whom you will know more) on her knee; and, as Joe came towards her, she turned her sweet face on me, and said, "Why, where is Joe's crutch?"

"It 's two miles off, sweetheart," I said. "He has come home without it. He 'll never want no crutch this side of the grave."

I saw her great soul rush into her eyes as she turned them on me; and then, with that strange way she had, when anything happened, of looking out for some one to praise, instead of, as many women do, looking out for some one to blame and fall foul of, she said to me, —

"This is your doing, my own brother. May God bless you for it."

She came up to bed with Harry, after us. As soon as she had put him to bed in the next room, I heard him awake Frank, his bedfellow, and tell him that Jesus had cured our Joe of his lameness.

Now, having got rid of Joe's crutch, we began to go further afield. Our country rambles were a great and acknowledged success. Joe, though terribly deformed in the body, was growing handsome and strong. What is more, Joe developed a quality, which even I should hardly have expected him to possess. Joe was got into a corner one day by a Danvers Street bully, and he there and then thrashed that bully. Reuben saw it, and would have interfered, had he not seen that Joe, with his gigantically long arms, had it all his own way; and so he left well alone.

We began to further afield, — sometimes going out on an omnibus, and walking home; sometimes walking all the way; Joe bringing his book-learning on natural objects to bear, and recognizing things which he had never seen before. Something new was discovered in this manner every day; and one day, in a lonely pond beyond Clapham, we saw three or four white flowers floating on the surface.

"Those," said Joe, "must be white water-lilies. I would give anything for one of them."

In those days, before the river had got into its present filthy

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condition, — in the times when you could catch a punt full of roach at Battersea Bridge, in the turn of a tide, — nearly every Chelsea boy could swim.

I very soon had my clothes off, and the lilies were carried home in triumph.

"Ah, mother!" said my father, "do you remember the lilies at Stanlake?"

"Ah, father!" said my mother.

"Acres on 'em," said my father, looking round radiantly; "hundreds on 'em. Yallah ones as well. Waterfalls, and chaney boys being poorly into cockle-shells, and marvel figures dancing as naked as they was born, and blowing tunes on whilk-shells, and winkles, and such like. Eh, mother!"

Mother began to cry.

"There, God bless me!" said my father; "I *am* a stupid brute if ever there were one. Mother, old girl, it were so many years agone. Come, now; it 's all past and gone, dear."

Fred, at this moment, seeing his mother in tears, broke out in a stentorian, but perfectly tearless, roar, and cast his bread and butter to the four winds. Emma had to take him and walk up and down with him, patting him on the back, and singing to him in her soft cooing voice.

There was a knock at the room-door just when she was opposite it, — she opened it, and there was Reuben; and I saw my father and mother look suddenly at one another.

"May I come in, cousin?" he said to my mother, in his pleasant voice. "Come, let 's have a game with the kids before I go up and sleep with the ghost."

"You 're welcome, Rube, my boy," said my father; "and you 're welcomer every day. We miss you, Rube, when you don't come; consequently, you 're welcome when you do, which is in reason. Therefore," said my father, pursuing his argument, "There 's the place by the fire, and there 's your backer, and there 's the kids. So, if mother's eyes is red, it 's with naught you 've done, old boy. Leave alone," I heard my father growl to himself (for I, as usual, was sitting next him); "is the sins of the fathers to be visited on the tables of kindred and affinity? No. In consequence, leave alone, I tell you. *He* did n't, any how. And there was worse than his father, — now then."

In a very short time we were all comfortable and merry, Reuben making the most atrocious riot with the "kids," my younger brothers. But I saw that Joe was distraught; and, with that profound sagacity which has raised me to my present eminence, I guessed that he was planning to go to Stanlake the very next Sunday.

The moment we were in bed, I saw how profoundly wise I was.

Joe broke out. He must see the "yallah" water-lilies; the chaney boys and the marvel figures were nothing; it was the yallah lilies. I, who had noticed more closely than he my mother's behavior when the place was mentioned, and the look she gave my father when Rube came in, had a sort of fear of going there, but Joe pleaded and pleaded until I was beaten; at last, I happily remembered that we did not know in which of the fifty-two counties of England Stanlake was situated. I mentioned this little fact to Joe. He suggested that I should ask my father. I declined doing anything of the sort; and so the matter ended for the night.

But Joe was not to be beaten. He came home later than usual from afternoon school next day. The moment we were alone together, he told me that he had been to see Mr. Faulkner. That he had asked him where Stanlake was; and that the old gentleman, — who knew every house and its history, within twenty miles of London, — had told him that it was three miles from Croydon, and was the seat of Sir George Hillyar.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE OF BARKER'S GAP.

THE Secretary rode steadily on across the broad sands by the silent sea, thinking of Gerty Neville, of how hot it was, of George Hillyar, of the convict he had left behind, of all sorts of things, until Cape Wilberforce was so near that it changed from a dull blue to a light brown, with gleams of green; and was no more a thing of air, but a real promontory, with broad hanging lawns of heath, and deep shadowed recesses among the cliffs. Then he knew that the forty-mile beach was nearly past, and that he was within ten miles of his journey's end and dinner. He whistled a tune. and began looking at the low wall of evergreen shrubs to his right.

At last, dray-tracks in the sand, and a road leading up from the shore through the tea-scrub, into which he passed inland. Hotter than ever here. Piles of drifted sand, scored over in every direction with the tracks of lizards of every sort and size; some of which slid away, with a muscular kind of waddle, into dark places; while others, refusing to move, opened their mouths at him, or let down bags under their chins, to frighten him. A weird sort of a place this, very snaky in appearance; not by any

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means the sort of place to lie down and go to sleep in on a hot night in March or September, when the wicked devils are abroad at night. Did any one of my readers ever lie down, dog-tired, on Kanonook Island, and hear the wretches sliding through the sand all night, with every now and then a subdued "Hish, hish, hish?" As the American gentleman says in "Martin Chuzzlewit," "Darn all manner of vermin!"

At nightfall, he came to a little cattle-station, where he slept It was owned by a little gray-headed Irish gentleman, who played the bassoon, and who had not one grievance, but fifty; who had been an ill-used man ever since he was born, — nay, even like Tristram Shandy, before. He had been unfortunate, had this Irish gentleman, in love, in literature, in commerce, and in politics; in his domestic relations, in his digestion; in Ireland, in India, in the Cape, and in New Zealand; still more unfortunate, according to his own showing, in Cooksland. He told all his grievances to the Secretary, proving clearly, as unsuccessful Irish gentlemen always can do, that it was not his own fault, but that things in general had combined against him. Then he asked for a place in the Customs for his second son. Lastly, he essayed to give him a tune on his bassoon; but the mason-flies had built their nests in it, and he had to clean them out with the worm-end of a ramrod; and so there was another grievance, as bad as any of the others. The Secretary had to go to bed without his music, and, indeed, had been above an hour asleep before the Irish gentleman succeeded in clearing the instrument. Then, after several trials, he managed to get a good bray out of it, got out his music-books, and set to work in good earnest, within four feet of the Secretary's head, and nothing but a thin board between them.

The country mended as he passed inland. He crossed a broad half-salt creek, within a hundred yards of the shore, where the great bream basked in dozens; and then he was among stunted gum-trees, looking not so very much unlike oaks, and deep braken fern. After this he came to a broad plain of yellow grass, which rolled up and up before him into a down; and, when he came, after a dozen miles, to the top of this, he looked into a broad bare valley, through which wound a large creek, fringed by a few tall white-stemmed trees, of great girth.

Beneath him were three long, low gray buildings of wood, placed so as to form three sides of a square, fronting the creek; and behind, stretching up the other side of the valley, was a large paddock, containing seven or eight fine horses. This was the police-station, at which Lieutenant Hillyar had been quartered for some time, — partly, it was said, in punishment for some escapade, and partly because two desperate escaped convicts

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from Van Diemen's Land were suspected to be in the neighborhood. Here George Hillyar had been thrown into the society of the Barkers, at whose house he had met Gerty Neville.

The Secretary reined his horse up in the centre of the little quadrangle, and roared out, Hallo! Whereupon a horse neighed in the paddock, but no other effect was produced.

He then tried a loud Cooe! This time the cat jumped up from where she lay in the sun, and ran indoors, and the horses in the paddock began galloping.

"Hallo! Hi! Here! Stable guard! Where the deuse have you all got to? Hallo!"

It was evident that there was not a soul about the place. The Secretary was very angry. "I'll report him; as sure as he's born, I'll report him. It is too bad. It is beyond anything I ever heard of, — to leave his station without a single man."

The Secretary got off his horse, and entered the principal room. He looked round in astonishment, and gave a long whistle. His bushman's eye told him, in one instant, that there had been an alarm or emergency of some kind, immediately after daybreak, while the men were still in bed. The mattresses and clothes were not rolled neatly up as usual, but the blankets were lying in confusion, just as the men had left them, when they had jumped out to dress. The carbines and swords were gone from the rack. He ran hurriedly out, and swung himself on to his horse, exclaiming, just as he would have done four-and-twenty years before at Harrow,

"Well! Here *is* a jolly row."

It was a bare mile to the Barkers' Station. In a few minutes he came thundering into their courtyard, and saw a pretty little woman, dressed in white, standing in front of the door, with a pink parasol over her head, holding by the hand a child, with nothing on but its night-shirt.

"My dear creature," cried the Secretary, "what the dickens is the matter?"

"Five bushrangers," cried Mrs. Barker. "They appeared suddenly last night, and stuck up the O'Malleys' station. There is nobody killed. There was no one in the house but Lesbia Burke, — who is inside now, — old Miles O'Malley, and the housekeeper. They got safe away when they saw them coming. They spared the men's huts, but have burnt the house down."

"Bad cess to them," said a harsh, though not unpleasant voice, behind her; and out came a tall, rather gray-headed woman, in age about fifty, but with remains of what must have been remarkable beauty. "Bad cess to them, I say, Mr. Oxton dear. 'T is the third home I have been burnt out of in twenty years. Is there sorra a statesman among ye all can give a poor old Phœnix

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beauty a house where she may die in peace? Is this your model colony, Secretary? Was it for this that I keened over the cold hearthstone at Garoopna, when we sold it to the Brentwoods, before brave Sam Buckley came a-wooing there, to win the beauty of the world? Take me back to Gippsland some of ye, and let me hear old Snowy growling through his boulders again, through the quiet summer's night; or take me back to Old Ireland, and let me sit sewing by the Castle window again, watching the islands floating on Corrib, or the mist driving up from the Atlantic before the west wind. Is this your model colony? Is there to be no pillow secure for the head of the jaded, despised old Dublin flirt, who has dressed, and dizened, and painted, and offered herself, till she became a scorn and a by-word? A curse on all your colonies! Old Ireland is worth more than all of them. A curse on them!"

"My dear Miss Burke! My dear Lesbia!" pleaded the Secretary.

"Don't talk to me. Hav'n't I been burnt out three times, by blacks and by whites? Hav'n't I had to fight for my life like a man? Don't I bear the marks of it? There is no rest for me. I know the noise of it too well; I heard it last night. Darkness, silence, sleep, and dreams of rest. Then the hoofs on the gravel, and the beating at the door. Then the awakening, and the terror, and the shots, stabs, blows, and curses. Then murder in the drawing-room, worse in the hall. Blood on the hearthstone, and fire on the roof-tree. Don't I know it all, James Oxton?"

"Dear Lesbia," said the good-natured Secretary, "old friend, do be more calm."

"Calm, James Oxton, and another home gone? Tell me, have you ever had your house burnt down? Do Agnes or Gerty know what it is to have their homes destroyed, and all their little luxuries broken and dispersed, their flowers trampled, and their birds killed? Do they know this?"

"Why, no," said the Secretary.

"And, if it were to happen to them, how would you feel?"

"Well, pretty much as you do, I suppose. Yes, I don't know but what I should get cross."

"Then, vengeance, good Secretary, vengeance! Honor and high rewards to the vermin-hunters; halters and death for the vermin."

And so Miss Burke went in, her magnificently-shaped head seeming to float in the air as she went, and her glorious figure showing some new curve of the infinitely variable curves of female beauty at every step. And it was high time she should go in; for the kind, good, honest soul was getting too much excited, and was talking more than was good for her. She had her faults,

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and was, as you see above, very much given to a Celtic-Danish-Milesian-Norman way of expressing herself, which is apt to be classified, on this side of St. George's Channel, as Irish rant. But her rant had a good deal of reason in it, — which some Irish rant has not, — and, moreover, was delivered with such magnificent accessories of voice and person, that James Oxton himself had been heard to declare that he would at any time walk twenty miles to see Lesbia Burke in a tantrum. Even, also, if you are heathen enough to believe that the whole art of rhetoric merely consists in plausibly overstating your case, with more or less dishonesty, as the occasion demands, or your conscience will allow, yet still you must admit that her rhetoric was successful, — for this reason: it produced on the Colonial Secretary exactly the effect she wished: it made him horribly angry. Those taunts of hers about his model colony were terribly hard hitting. Had not his Excellency's speech at the opening of the Houses contained — nay, mainly consisted of — a somewhat offensive comparison between Cooksland and the other five colonies of the Australian group; in which the perfect security of life and property at home was contrasted with the fearful bush-ranger-outrages in New South Wales. And now their turn had come, — Cooksland's turn, — the turn of James Oxton, who had made Cooksland, and who *was* Cooksland. And to meet the storm there were only four troopers and cadets in command of Lieutenant Hillyar, the greatest fool in the service.

"Oh, if that fellow will only bear himself like a man this one day!" said the Secretary, as he rode swiftly along. "Oh for Wyatt, or Malone, or Maclean, or Dixon, for one short hour! Oh, to get the thing snuffed out suddenly and sharply, and be able to say, 'That is the way *we* manage matters.'"

One, two, three — four — five — six, seven, eight shots in the distance, sounding dully through the dense forest. Then silence, then two more shots; and muttering, half as a prayer, half as an exclamation, "God save us!" he dashed through the crowded timber as fast as his noble horse would carry him.

He was cutting off an angle in the road, and, soon after he joined it again, he came on the place where the shots had been fired. There were two men — neither of them police — wounded on the grass, and at first he hoped they were two of the bush-rangers; but, unluckily, they turned out to be two of Barker's stockmen. Two lads, who attended to them, told him that the bush-rangers had turned on the party here, and shown fight; that no one had been wounded but these two; that in retreating they had separated, three having gone to the right, and two to the left; that Lieutenant Hillyar had ordered Mr. Barker's men, and three troopers, to go to the right; while he, attended only by Cadet

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Simpson, had followed the two who were gone to the left, with the expressed intention of riding them down, as they were the best mounted of the five robbers.

"I hope," thought the Secretary, "that he will not make a fool of himself. The fellow is showing pluck and resolution, though,—a deal of pluck and resolution. He means to make a spoon or spoil a horn to-day."

So, armed only with a hunting-whip, he put his horse at a canter, and hurried on to overtake Hillyar. Soon after he heard several shots ahead, and began to think he might as well have had something better in his hand than a hunting-whip. Then he met a riderless horse, going large and wild, neighing and turning his head from side to side, and carrying, alas! a government saddle. Then he came on poor Simpson, lying by the side of the road, looking very ghastly and wild, evidently severely wounded.

Mr. Oxton jumped off, and cried, "Give me your carbine, my poor lad. Where 's Hillyar?"

"Gone after the other two," said Simpson, feebly.

"Two to one now, eh?" said Mr. Oxton. "This gets exciting."

So he rode away, with the carbine on his knee; but he never had occasion to use it. Before he had ridden far he came on the body of one of the convicts, lying in a heap by the road-side; and, a very short time afterwards, he met a young gentleman, in an undress light-dragoon uniform, who was riding slowly towards him, leading, handcuffed to his saddle, one of the most fiendish-looking ruffians that eye ever beheld.

"Well done, Hillyar! Bravely done, sir!" cried Mr. Oxton. "I am under personal obligations to you. The colony is under personal obligations to you, sir. You are a fine fellow, sir!"

"Recommend me to these new American revolvers, Mr. Secretary," replied the young man. "These fellows had comparatively no chance at me with their old pistols, though this fellow has unluckily hit poor Simpson. When we came to close quarters I shot one fellow, but this one, preferring hanging (queer taste), surrendered, and here he is."

This Lieutenant Hillyar, of whom we have heard so much and seen so little, was certainly a very handsome young fellow. Mr. Oxton was obliged to confess that. He was tall and well-made, and his features were not rendered less attractive by the extreme paleness of his complexion, though one who knew the world as well as the Secretary could see that the deep lines in his face told of desperate hard living; and yet now (whether it was that the Secretary was anxious to make the best of him, or that George Hillyar was anxious to make the best of himself), his appearance was certainly not that of a dissipated person. He looked high-bred

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and handsome, and lolled on his horse with an air of easy langor, not actually unbecoming in a man who had just done an act of such unequivocal valor.

"Revolvers or not, sir," said Mr. Oxton, "there is no doubt about your courage and determination. I wonder if the other party will have fared as well as you."

"Undoubtedly," said Hillyar; "the other three fellows were utterly outnumbered. I assure you I took great pains about this business. I was determined it should succeed. You see, I have, unfortunately, a rather biting tongue, and have made myself many enemies; and I have been an objectless man hitherto, and perhaps have lived a little too hard. Now, however, that I have something to live for, I shall change all that. I wish the colony to hear a different sort of report about me; and more than that, I wish to rise in the esteem of the Honorable James Oxton, Chief Secretary for the Colony of Cooksland, and I have begun already."

"You have, sir," said the Secretary, frankly. "Much remains; however, we will talk more of this another time. See, here lies poor Simpson; let us attend to him. Poor fellow!"

CHAPTER VIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF THE EXPEDITION TO STANLAKE.

I HAD a presentiment that our proposed Sunday expedition to Stanlake would lead to something; and I was anxious. I noticed that my mother had cried at the mention of the place. I saw the look that my father and mother interchanged when Reuben came in; and I had overheard my father's confidential growl about the sins of the fathers being visited on the children, and so on. Therefore I felt very much as if I was doing wrong in yielding to Joe's desire to go there, without telling my father. But I simply acquiesced, and never mentioned my scruples (after my first feeble protest in bed) even to Joe. And I will confess why. I had a great curiosity to see the place. I was only a poor stupid blacksmith-lad; but my crippled brother had given me a taste for beautiful things, and, from my father's description, this was the most beautiful place in the world. Then there was the charm of secrecy and romance about this expedition, — but

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why analyze the motives of a boy? To put it shortly, we deceived our good father and mother for the first time when we went there; and we reaped the consequences.

The consequences! But had the consequences been shown to me in a glass, on that bright Sunday morn when we started to Stanlake, should I have paused? I have asked myself that question more than once, and I have answered it thus. If I had seen all the consequences which were to follow on that expedition then, I would have thrown myself off Battersea Bridge sooner than have gone. But I was only a blind, ignorant boy at that time. Now, as a man, I begin, dimly and afar off, to understand why we were let go. I don't see it all yet, but I begin to see it.

I think that, if I had been the same man that morning as I am now, I would have said a prayer — and gone.

Now, what seems almost like accident, were there such a thing, favored us that Sunday morning. An affair which had been growing to a head for some time came to its crisis that morning. Mr. and Mrs. William Avery had taken our first floor, and Bill himself was not going on at all well. Mrs. Bill had a nasty tongue, and he was much too "handy with his hands." So it came about that Bill was more and more at the "Black Lion," and that my father, who had contrived to sawder up every man-and-wife quarrel in the buildings, was fairly puzzled here. This very Saturday evening the crash came. We had heard him and his wife "at it" all the evening; and heavy things, such as chairs, had been falling overhead, whereat my mother had said, "There! Did you ever?" But at eight o'clock, Emma, taking Fred up the broad old stairs to bed, in his night-gown, leading him with one hand, holding a lighted candle in the other, and slowly crooning out "The Babes in the Wood" in her own sweet way, was alarmed by the Averys' door being burst open, and by the awful spectacle of Mr. and Mrs. Avery fighting on the landing. Instantly after, whether on purpose or by accident I cannot say, the poor woman was thrown headlong down stairs, on to the top of Emma and Fred. The candle behaved like a magnificent French firework; but Mrs. Bill, Emma, and Fred, came down in a heap on the mat, the dear child, with his usual luck, underneath.

After this, William Avery, holding the landing, and audibly, nay, loudly, expressing his desire to see the master-blacksmith who would come up stairs and offer to interfere between a man and his wife, it became necessary for Mrs. Avery to be accommodated below for the night. The next morning, after the liquor had died out of him, William Avery was brought to task by my father; and during the imbroglio of recriminations which ensued, which ended in an appeal to the magistrate, we boys dared to do

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what we had never dared to do before, — to escape church, take the steamer to London Bridge, and get on to Croydon by the atmospheric railway, reaching that place at half-past twelve.

It was September, but it was summer still. Those who live in the country, they tell me, can see the difference between a summer-day in September and a summer-day in June; but we townfolks cannot. The country-folks have got tired of their flowers, and have begun to think of early fires, and shortening days, and turnips, and deep cover, and hollies standing brave and green under showering oak-leaves, which fall on the swift wings of flitting woodcocks; but to town-folks September is even as June. The same deep shadows on the grass, the same tossing plumage on the elms, the same dull silver on the willows. More silence in the brooks perhaps, and more stillness in the woods; but the town-bred eye does not recognize the happy doze before the winter's sleep. The country is the country to them, and September is as June.

On a bright September day, Joe and I came, well directed, to some park-palings, and after a short consultation we — in for a penny in for a pound, demoralized by the domestic differences of Mr. and Mrs. Bill Avery — climbed over them, and stood, trespassing flagrantly in the park which they enclosed. We had no business there. We knew we were doing wrong. We knew that we ought to have gone to church that morning. We were guilty beings for, I really think, the first time in our lives. William Avery's having thrown his wife down stairs on to the top of Emma and Fred had been such a wonderful disturbance of old order and law, that we were in a revolutionary frame of mind. We knew that order would be once more restored, some time or another, but, meanwhile, the barricades were up, and the jails were burning; so we were determined to taste the full pleasure derivable from a violent disturbance of the political balance.

First of all we came on a bright broad stream, in which we could see brown spotted fish, scudding about on the shallows, which Joe said must be trout. And, after an unsuccessful attempt to increase the measure of our sins by adding poaching to trespass, we passed on towards a dark wood, from which the stream issued.

It was a deep dark wood of lofty elms, and, as we passed on into it, the gloom grew deeper. Far aloft the sun gleamed on the highest boughs; but, beneath, the stream swept on through the shadows, with scarcely a gleam of light upon the surface. At last we came on a waterfall, and, on our climbing the high bank on one side of it, the lake opened on our view. It was about a quarter of a mile long, hemmed in by wood on all sides, with a boat-house, built like a Swiss chalet, half-way along it.

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The silence and solitude were profound; nothing seemed moving but the great dragon-flies; it was the most beautiful place we had ever seen; nothing would have stopped us now short of a policeman.

We determined to wait, and go further before we gathered the water-lilies; then, suddenly, up rose a great red-and-black butterfly, and Joe cried out to me for heaven's sake to get it for him. Away went the butterfly, and I after it, headlong, not seeing where I went, only intent on the chase. At one time I clambered over a sunk fence, and found myself out of the wood; then I vaulted over an iron hurdle, then barely saved myself from falling into a basin of crystal water, with a fountain in the middle; then I was on a gravel walk, and at last got my prize under my cap, in the middle of a bed of scarlet geranium and blue lobelia.

"Hang it, I thought, I must be out of this pretty quick. *This* won't do. We shan't get through this Sunday without a blessed row, I *know*."

A voice behind me said, with every kind of sarcastic emphasis:—

"*Upon* my veracity, young gentleman. *Upon* my word and honor. Now do let me beg and pray of you, my dear creature, to make yourself entirely at home. Trample, and crush, and utterly destroy, three or four more of my flower-beds, and then come in and have some lunch. *Upon* my word and honor!"

I turned, and saw behind me a very handsome gentleman, of about fifty-five or so, in a blue coat, a white waistcoat, and drab trousers, exquisitely neat, who stood and looked at me, with his hands spread abroad interrogatively, and his delicate eyebrows arched into an expression of sarcastic inquiry. "He won't hit me," was my first thought; and so I brought my elbows down from above my ears, rolled up my cap with the butterfly inside it, and began to think about flight.

I could n't take my eyes off him. He was a strange figure to me. So very much like a perfect piece of waxwork. His coat was so blue, his waistcoat so white, his buttons so golden, his face so smoothly shaven, and his close-cropped gray hair so wonderfully sleek. His hands too, such a delicate mixture of brown and white, with one blazing diamond on the right one. I saw a grand gentleman for the first time, and this, combined with a slightly guilty conscience, took the edge off my London prentice audacity, and made me just the least bit in the world afraid.

I had refinement enough (thanks to my association with Joe, a gentleman born,) not to be impudent. I said,—"I am very, very sorry, sir. The truth is, sir, I wanted this butterfly, and I followed it into your grounds. I meant no harm, indeed, sir. (As I *said* it, in those old times, it ran something like this,—"I

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wanted that ere butterfly, sir, and I follered of it into your little place, which I did n't mean no harm, I do assure you)."

"Well! well! well!" said Sir George Hillyar, "I don't say you did. When I was at Eton, I have bee-hunted into all sorts of strange places. To the very feet of royalty, on one occasion. Indeed, you are forgiven. See here, Erne: here is a contrast to your lazy style of life; here is a ——"

"Blacksmith," I said.

"Blacksmith," said Sir George, "I beg your pardon; who will — will — do *all kinds of things* (he said this with steady severity) in pursuit of a butterfly. An example, my child."

Taking my eyes from Sir George Hillyar, for the first time, I saw that a boy, about my own age apparently, (I was nearly sixteen,) had come up and was standing beside him, looking at me, with his arm passed through his father's, and his head leaning against his shoulder.

Such a glorious lad. As graceful as a deer. Dark brown hair, that wandered about his forehead like the wild boughs of a neglected vine; features regular and beautiful; a complexion well-toned, but glazed over with rich sun-brown; a most beautiful youth, yet whose beauty was extinguished and lost in the blaze of two great blue-black eyes, which forced you to look at them, and which made you smile as you looked.

So I saw him first. How well I remember his first words, "Who is this?"

I answered promptly for myself. I wanted Joe to see him, for we had never seen anything like him before, and Joe was now visible in the dim distance, uncertain what to do. I said, "I hunted this butterfly, sir, from the corner of the lake into this garden; and, if you will come to my brother Joe, he will confirm me. May I go, sir?"

"You may go, my boy," said Sir George; "and, Erne, you may show him off the place, if you please. This seems an honest lad, Erne. You may walk with him if you will."

So he turned and went towards the house, which I now had time to look at. A bald, bare, white place, after all; with a great expanse of shadeless flower-garden round it. What you would call a very great place, but a very melancholy one, which looked as though it must be very damp in winter. The lake in the wood was the part of that estate which pleased me best.

Erne and I walked away together, towards the dark, inscrutable future, and never said a word till we joined Joe. Then we three walked on through the wood, Joe very much puzzled by what had happened; and at last Erne said to me, —

"What is your name?"

"Jim."

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"I say, Jim, what did you come here for, old fellow?"

"We came after the water-lilies," I said. "We were told there were yellow ones here."

"So there were," he said; "but we have rooted them all up. If you will come here next Sunday, I will get you some."

"I am afraid we can't, sir," I said. "If it had n't been for Bill Avery hitting his missis down stairs, we could n't have come here to-day. And we shall catch it now."

"Do you go to school?" said Erne.

"No, sir; I am apprenticed to father. Joe here does."

"Do the fellows like you, Joe? Have you got any friends?"

Joe stopped, and looked at him. He said, —

"Yes, sir. Many dear friends, God be praised! though I am only a poor hunchback. Have you many, sir?"

"Not one single one, God help me, Joe. Not one single one."

It came on to rain, but he would not leave us. We walked to the station together; and, as we walked, Joe, the poet, told us tales, so that the way seemed short. Tales of sudden friendships made in summer gardens, which outlive death. Of long-sought love; of lands far off; lands of peace and wealth, where there was no sorrow, no care; only an eternal, dull, aching regret for home, never satisfied; and of the great heaving ocean, which thundered and burst everlastingly on the pitiless coast, and sent its echoes booming up the long-drawn corridors of the dark, storm-shaken forest capes.

Did Joe tell us all these stories, or has my memory become confused? I forget, good reader, I forget; it is so long ago.

We had to wait, and Erne would sit and wait with us in the crowded waiting-room, and he sat between Joe and me. He asked me where I lived, and I told him, "Church Place, Church Street, Chelsea." Somehow we were so crowded that his arm got upon my shoulder, just as if he were a school-fellow and an equal. The last words he said were, —

"Come back and see me, Jim. I have not got a friend in the world."

Joe, in the crush before the train started, heard the station-master say to a friend, — "It 's a queer thing: it runs in families. There 's young Erne Hillyar is going the same way as his brother. I seen him, with my own eyes, sitting in the second-class waiting-room, with his arm on the shoulder of a common young cad. He has took to low company, you see; and he will go to the devil, like his brother."

If the station-master had known what I thought of him after I heard this, he would not have slept the better, I fancy. Low company, forsooth. Could the Honorable James Burton, of the Supreme Council of Cooksland, Colonial Commissioner for the

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Exhibition of 1862, ever have been justly described as "low company?" Certainly not. I was very angry then. I am furious now. Intolerable!

This Sunday's expedition, so important as it was, was never inquired into by my father. When we got home we found that our guilty looks were not noticed. The affair between William Avery and his wife had complicated itself, and got to be very serious, and sad indeed. When we got home we found my father sitting and smoking opposite my mother; and, on inquiry, we heard that Emma had been sent up to bed with the children at seven o'clock.

I thought at first that we were going to "catch it." I, who knew every attitude of theirs so well, could see that they were sitting in judgment; and I thought it was on us. This was the first time we had ever done any great wrong to them; and I felt that, if we could have it out, there and then, we should be happier. And so I went to my father's side, put my arm on his shoulder, and said, —

"Father, I will tell you all about it."

"My old Jim," he answered, "what can you tell, any more than we have heard this miserable day? We know all as you may have heard, my boy. Little Polly Martin, too. Who would have thought it?"

My mother began to cry bitterly. I began to guess that William Avery had quarrelled with his wife on the grounds of jealousy, and, also, that my father and mother had sifted the evidence and pronounced her guilty. I knew all about it at once from those few words, though I was but a lad of sixteen.

I knew now, and I had suspected before, that young Mrs. Avery was no longer such a one as my father and mother would allow to sit down in the same room with Emma.

She had been, before her marriage, a dark-eyed, pretty little body, apparently quite blameless in every way, and a great favorite of my mother's. But she married William Avery, a smart young waterman, rather to much given to "potting," and she learnt the accursed trick of drinking from him. And then everything went wrong. She could sing, worse luck; and one Saturday night she went marketing, and did not come home. And he went after her, and found her singing in front of the Six Bells in the King's Road, having spent all his money. And then he beat her for the first time; and then things went on from bad to worse, till the last and worst crash came, on the very week when Joe and I ran away to Stanlake.

William was fined by Mr. Paynter for beating his wife; and soon after *his* end came. He took seriously to drinking. One dark night he and his mate were bringing the barge down on the

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tide, — his mate, Sam Agar, with the sweeps, and poor Avery steering, — and she (the barge) would n't behave. Sam knew that poor Avery was drunk, and rectified his bad steering with the sweeps as well as he was able. But, approaching Battersea Bridge, good Sam saw that she was broadside to the tide, and cried out, — "Starboard, Bill! Starboard, old boy, for God's sake!" but there was no answer. She struck the Middlesex pier of the main arch heavily, and nearly heaved over and went down, but righted and swung through. When Sam Agar found himself in clear water, he ran aft to see after Bill Avery. But the poor fellow had tumbled over long before, and the barge had been steering herself for a mile. His body came ashore opposite Smith's distillery, and Mr. Wakley delivered himself of a philippic against drunkenness to the jury who sat upon him.

And his wife went utterly to the bad. I thought we had heard the last of her, but it was not so. My mother's face, when she turned up again, after so many years, ought to have been photographed and published. "Well, now, you know, this really *is*," was what she *said*. It was the expression of her face, the look of blank, staring wonder that amused Joe and me so much.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR GEORGE HILLYAR.

One morning in September, Sir George Hillyar sat in his study, before his escritoire, very busy with his papers; and beside him was his lawyer, Mr. Compton.

Sir George was a singularly handsome, middle-aged gentleman, with a square ruddy face, very sleek close-cropped gray hair, looking very high-bred and amiable, save in two points. He had a short thick neck, like a bulldog, and a very obstinate-looking and rather large jaw. To give you his character in a few words, he was a just, kind man, of not very high intellect, in spite of his high cultivation; of intensely strong affections, and (whether it was the fault of his thick neck, or his broad jaw, I cannot say), as obstinate as a mule.

"Are you really going to renew this lease, Sir George?" said Mr. Compton.

"Why, yes, I think so. I promised Erne I would."

"Will you excuse me, Sir George, if I ask, as your confidential

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friend of many years' standing, what the deuse my young friend Erne has to do with the matter?"

"Nothing in the world," said Sir George; "but they got hold of him when we were down there, and he got me to promise. Therefore I must, don't you see."

"No, I don't. This widow and her sons are ruining the farm; you propose to give them seven years longer to complete their work. How often have you laid it down as a rule, never to renew a lease to a widow; and here you are doing it, because that young gaby, Erne, has been practised on, and asks you."

"I know all that," said Sir George, "but I am quite determined."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Compton, rather nettled, "let 's say no more. I know what *that* means."

"You see, Compton, I *will* not disappoint that boy in anything of this kind. I have kept him here alone with me, and allowed him to see scarce any one. You know why. And the boy has not seen enough of the outside world, and has no sympathies with his fellow-men whatever. And I will not baulk him in this. These are the first people he has shown an interest in, Compton, and he shan't be baulked."

"He would have shown an interest in plenty of people, if you would have let him," said the lawyer. "You have kept him mewed up here till he is fifteen, with no companion but his tutor, and your gray-headed household. The boy has scarcely spoken with a human being under fifty in his lifetime. Why don't you let him see young folks of his own age?"

"Why!" said Sir George angrily. "Have I two hearts to break that you ask me this? You know why, Compton. You know how that woman and her child broke my heart once. Do you want it broken again by this, the child of my old age, I may say, — the child of my angel Mary?"

"You will have your heart broken if you don't mind, Hillyar," said the lawyer. "I will speak out once and for all. If you keep that boy tied up here in this unnatural way, he will play the deuse some day or another. Upon my word, Hillyar, this fantigue of yours approaches lunacy. To keep a noble high-mettled boy like Erne cooped up among gray-headed grooms and footmen, and never to allow him to see a round young face except in church. It is rank madness."

"I have had enough of young servants," said Sir George. "I will have no more Samuel Burtons, if you please."

"Who the deuse wants you to? Send the boy among lads in his own rank in life."

"I have done it once. They bore him. He don't like 'em."

"Because you don't let him choose them for himself."

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"Let him have the chance of choosing, in his ignorance, such ruffians as young Mottesfont and young Peters, for instance," said Sir George, scornfully. "No more of that, thank you, either. You are a sage counsellor, upon my word, Compton. Let us change the subject."

"Upon my honor we had better," said the lawyer, "if I am to keep my temper. You are, without exception, the most wrong-headed man I ever saw. This I will say, that, as soon as Erne is released from this unnatural restraint, as he must be soon, he will make friends with the first young man, and fall in love with the first pretty face, he sees. You have given him no selection; and, by Jove, you have given him a better chance of going to the deuse than ever you did his half-brother."

Obstinate men are not always ill-tempered; Sir George Hillyar was not an ill-tempered man. His obstinacy arose as much perhaps from self-esteem, caused by his having been from his boyhood master of ten thousand a year, as from his bull-neck and broad jaw. He was perfectly good-tempered over this scolding of his kind old friend; he only said, —

"Now, Compton, you know me. I have thought over the matter more than you have. I am determined. Let us get on to business."

"*Very* well!" said the lawyer; "these papers you have signed; I had better take them to the office."

"Yes; put 'em in your old japanned box, and put it on the third shelf from the top, between Viscount Saltire and the Earl of Ascot; not much in *his* box, is there, hey!"

"A deal there should n't be," said the lawyer. "Is there *nothing* else for me to put in the tin box of Sir George Hillyar, Bart. on the third shelf from the top?"

"No! hang it, no, Compton. I 'll keep it here. I *might* alter it. Things might happen; and, when death looks in between the curtains, a man is apt to change his mind. I 'll keep it here."

He pointed to the tall fantastically-carved escritoire at which he was sitting, and, tapping it, said once again, "I 'll keep it here, Compton; I 'll keep it here, old friend."

Sir George Hillyar's history is told in a very few words. His first marriage was a singularly unfortunate one. Lady Hillyar sold herself to him for his wealth, and afterwards revenged herself on him by leading him the life of a dog. She was an evil-tempered woman, and her ill-temper improved by practice. They had one son, the Lieutenant Hillyar we have already seen in Australia, and whose history we have heard; whose only recollections of a mother must have been those of a restless dark woman who wrangled and wept perpetually. Sir George Hillyar's constitutional obstinacy did him but little good here; his

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calm inflexibility was more maddening to his fierce wild wife than the loudest objurgation would have been. One night, when little George was lying in his cradle, she kissed him and left the house; left it for utter ruin and disgrace; unfaithful more from temper than from passion.

In two years she died. She wore her fierce heart out at last in ceaseless reproaches on the man with whom she had fled, the man whom she had jilted that she might marry Sir George Hillyar. A dark wild story all through; which left its traces on the obstinate face of Sir George Hillyar, and on the character and life of his poor boy.

Dark suspicions arose in his mind about this boy. He never loved him, but he was inexorably just to him. His suspicions about him were utterly groundless; his common sense told him that, but he could not love him, for he had nearly learnt to hate his mother. He was more than ordinarily careful over his education, and his extra care led to the disasters we know of.

But there was a brief glimpse of sunshine in store for Sir George Hillyar. He was still a young, and, in spite of all appearances, a warm-hearted man. And he fell in love again.

He went down into Wiltshire to shoot over an outlying estate of his, which he seldom visited save for sporting purposes, keeping no establishment there, but lodging with his bailiff. And it so happened that the gamekeeper's daughter came down the long grass ride, between the fallowing hazel copse, under the October sun, to bring them lunch. And she was so divinely beautiful that he shot badly all the afternoon, and in the evening went to the keeper's lodge to ask questions about the pheasants, and saw her again. And she was so graceful, so good, and so modest, that in four days he asked her to marry him; and, if ever there was a happy marriage it was this; for truth is stranger than fiction, as many folks know.

They had one boy, whom they christened Erne, after an Irish family; and, when he was two years old, poor Lady Hillyar stayed out too late one evening on the lake, too soon after her second confinement. She caught cold, and died, leaving an infant who quickly followed her. And then Sir George transferred all the love of his heart to the boy Erne, who, as he grew, showed that he had inherited not only his mother's beauty, but all the yielding gentleness of her disposition.



CHAPTER X.

ERNE MAKES HIS ESCAPE FROM THE BRAZEN TOWER.

After his wife's death, Sir George Hillyar transferred all the love of his heart from the dead mother to the living child. He was just to his eldest son; but George Hillyar could not but see that he was as naught compared to his younger half-brother, — nay, more, could not but see that there was something more than mere indifference in his father's feeling towards him; there was dislike. Carefully as Sir George concealed it, as he thought, the child discovered it, and the boy resented it. And so it fell out that George Hillyar never knew what it was to be loved until he met Gertrude Neville. By his father's mistaken policy, with regard to his education, he was thrown among vicious people, and became terribly vicious himself. He went utterly to the dogs. He grew quite abandoned at one time; and was within reach of the law. But, perhaps, the only wise thing his father ever did for him, was to stop his rambles on the Continent, and, partly by persuasion, partly by threats, induce him to go to Australia. He got a cadetship in the police, partly for the pay, partly for the uniform, partly for the sake of the *entrée*, — the recognized position it would give him in certain quarters. So he raised himself somewhat. He found, at first, that it *paid* to be respectable. Then he found that it was pleasant to be in society; and his old life appeared, at times, to be horrible to him. And, at last, he fell in love with Gerty Neville; and, what is stranger still, she fell in love with him. At this time there is a chance for him. As we leave him with good Mr. Oxton, looking after his wounded comrade, his fate hangs in the balance.

After his terrible *fiasco*, Sir George would have no more of schools or young servants. He had been careful enough with his firstborn (as he thought then); he would lock Erne up in a brazen tower. He filled his house with grey-headed servants; he got for the boy, at a vast expense, a gentle, kind old college don as tutor, — a man who had never taken orders, with a taste for natural history, who wished to live peaceably, and mix with good society. The boy Erne was splendidly educated and cared for. He was made a little prince, but they never spoiled him. He must have friends of his own age, of course: Lord Edward Bellamy and the little Marquis of Tullygoram were selected, and induced to come and stay with him, after close inquiries, and

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some dexterous manœuvring on the part of Sir George. But Erne did not take to them. They were nice, clever lads, but neither of them had been to school, Erne objected. He wanted to know fellows who had been to school; nay, rebelliously wanted to go to school himself, — which was not to be thought of. In short, at fifteen, Erne was a very noble, sensitive, well-educated and clever lad, without a single friend of his own age; and, becoming rebellious, he began to cast about to find friends for himself. It was through Providence, and not Sir George's good management, that he did not do worse in that way, than he did, poor lad.

Sir George Hillyar and Mr. Compton met in the dining-room at the second gong. Sir George rang the bell and asked if Mr. Erne was come in. He was not.

"We will have dinner, though. If the boy likes his soup cold, let him have it so." And so they went to dinner.

But no Erne. Claret and abuse of Lord John; then coffee and abuse of Sir Robert; but no Erne. They began to get uneasy.

"He has never gone out like this before," said Sir George. "I must really make inquiries."

But no one could answer them. Erne was not in his bedroom. His horse was in the stable. Even Mr. Compton got anxious.

Obstinate men are pretty sure to adopt the counsels they have scornfully declined, as soon as they can do so without being observed. Old Compton knew obstinate men well; and knew, therefore, that what he had said about Erne's being kept in solitude, would, after a decent lapse of time, lead to Erne's being treated in a more rational way. He knew well that no people are more easily managed than obstinate people (by those whom they thoroughly respect), if a sharp attack is made on them, and then silence preserved on the subject ever after. He knew that the slightest renewal of the subject would postpone the adoption of his advice indefinitely, for he knew that obstinacy was only generated by conceit and want of determination. Therefore he was very anxious.

"Erne has bolted," he thought, "and ruined all. There is no chance of knocking sense into his father's head this next ten years."

But Sir George walked uneasily up and down, thinking of far other things. His terror took a material form. Something must have happened to Erne. He had gone out alone, and something had befallen him; what, he could not conceive, but he vowed that, if he ever got him back again, he should choose what companion he would, but should never go out alone any more. By

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daylight he was half crazy with anxiety, and just afterwards frantic. The head-keeper came in, and reported that one of the boats was loose on the lake.

They dragged it madly, from end to end. The country people heard that young Erne Hillyar was drowned in Stanlake Pool, and were kind enough to come in by hundreds. It was the best thing since the fair. The gypsies moved up in a body, and told fortunes. The country-folks came and sat in rows on the wire fences, like woodpigeons on ash-trees in autumn. The young men and boys "chivied" one another through the flower-garden, turned on the fountains, and pushed one another into the marble basins; and the draggers dragged in the lake, and produced nothing but water-lily roots; which, being mistaken for rare esculents by the half-cockney population, were stolen by the thousand, and, after abortive attempts to eat them, were (politically speaking) thrown in the teeth of Sir George Hillyar, at the next election, by a radical cobbler who compared him to Foulon.

At five o'clock, the body not having been found, Sir George Hillyar, having pre-determined that his son was drowned, gave orders for the cutting of the big dam, not without slight misgivings that he was making a fool of himself. Then the fun grew fast and furious. This was better than the fair by a great deal. They brought up beer in large stone-bottles from the public-house, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly. By a quarter to six the lake was nearly dry, and nearly everybody was drunk. At this time the first fish was caught; a young man ducked into the mud, and brought out a ten-pound carp by his gills, exclaiming, "Here's the body, Bill!" which expression passed into the joke of the evening. Every time a fresh carp, tench, or pike, was thrown out kicking into the gravel, the young men would roar out, "Here's the body, Bill," once more. At last the whole affair approached very nearly to a riot. Women, who had come after their husbands, were heard here and there scolding or shrieking. There were two or three fights. There had been more beer ordered than was paid for. A policeman had been pushed into the mud. But no body.

The butler, coming into the library at ten o'clock to see the windows shut against the loose characters who were hanging about, discovered the body of Erne Hillyar, Esquire, in an easy-chair, reading *Blackwood's Magazine* by a bedroom candlestick. And the body said, "I say, Simpson, what the deuse is all that row about down by the lake?"

"They have cut the dam, and let off the water to find your body, sir," replied Simpson, who prided himself on not being taken by surprise.

"What fools," said Erne. "Is the Governor in a great *wax*?"

"I fancy not sir, *at present*," replied Simpson.

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"Tell him I wish to speak to him, will you," said Erne, turning over a page. "Say I should be glad of a word with him, if he will be good enough to step this way." And so he went on unconcernedly reading; and Simpson, who had a profound belief in Erne, went to Sir George, and delivered the message exactly as Erne had given it.

Sir George came raging into the room in a very few minutes. Erne half-closed his book, keeping his finger in the place, and, quietly looking up at his father, said,

"I am afraid you expected me home last night, my dear father."

Sir George was too much astounded by Erne's coolness, to do more than gasp.

"I hope I have not caused you any anxiety. But the fact is this; I went into town by the five o'clock train, to see the Parkers at Brompton; and they offered me a bed (it being late), which I accepted. I went for a ramble this morning, which ended in my walking all the way home here; and that is what makes me so late."

"You seem to have a good notion of disposing of your own time, without notice, sir," said Sir George, who had been so astounded by his reception, that he had not yet had time to lay his hand upon his wrath-bottle.

"Yes, I like having an impromptu ramble of this kind. It is quite a new experience do you know, dad," said Erne, speaking with a little more animation, and laying aside his book for the first time. "I would have given a hundred pounds for you to have been with me to-day. New scenes and new people all the way home. As new to me — nay, newer and fresher — than the Sandwich Islands would be. I wish you had been there."

"Does n't it strike you, sir, that you are taking this matter somewhat coolly?" said Sir George, aghast.

"No! am I?" said Erne. "That is a compliment, coming from you, dad. How often have you told me, that you hated a man without self-possession. See how I have profited by your teaching?"

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Sir George, finding his wrath-bottle, and drawing the cork. "Are you aware that the dam has been cut to find your body? Are you aware of that, sir? Do you know, sir, that the populace have, in the excitement consequent on your supposed death, overrun my pleasure-grounds, trampled on my flower-beds, broken my statues, and made faces at my lawyer through my drawing-room window?"

If ever you try a torrent of invective, for heaven's sake steer clear of details, lest in the heat of your speech you come suddenly across a ridiculous or homely image, and, rhetorically speaking, ruin yourself at once, as did Sir George Hillyar on this occasion.

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As he thundered out this last terrible consequence of Erne's absence, Erne burst out laughing, and Sir George, intensely delighted at getting him back again on any terms, and also dying for a reconciliation, burst out laughing too, and held out his arms. After which the conversation took another tone; as thus, —

"Why did you go away, and never give me notice, my boy?"

"I won't do it again. I will tell you next time." And all that sort of thing.

* * * * * *

"What on earth has come over the boy?" said Sir George Hillyar to himself as soon as he was in bed, lying on his back, with his knees up, which is the best attitude for thinking in bed. "He will make a debater, that boy, sir, mark my words. I tell you, sir," continued he, angrily, and somewhat rudely contradicting himself, "that you have been a fool about that boy. The cool way in which he turned on you to-day, sir, and, partly by calculating on your affection for him, and partly by native tact and self-possession, silenced you, sir — got his own way, established a precedent for going out when he chose, and left you strongly disinclined to risk another battle — was, I say, sir, masterly.

After a time, having sufficiently contradicted and bullied himself, he turned over on his side, and said, as he was falling to sleep, —

"The boy is wonderfully changed in one day. He shall go again if he chooses. I never saw such a change in my life. He never showed fight like this before. What can be the matter with him?"

The old complaint, Sir George. The boy has fallen in love. Nothing else.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRETARY SEES NOTHING FOR IT BUT TO SUBMIT.

THE talk of the colony, for a week or so, turned upon nothing else but the gallant exploit of Lieutenant Hillyar with the bush-rangers. He became the hero of the day. His orderly persuaded him to have his hair cut; and the locks went off like smoke at half-a-crown apiece; so fast, indeed, that the supply fell short of the demand, and had to be supplied from the head of a young Danish trooper, who, after this, happening to get drunk in Palmerston, while in plain clothes, and not being recognized, was

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found to be so closely cropped that it was necessary to remand him for inquiries, as it was obvious to the meanest capacity that he had n't been out of jail more than a couple of days.

The papers had leading articles upon it. The *Palmerston Sentinel* (squatter* interest, conservative, aristocratic,) said that this was your old English blood, and that there was nothing like it. The *Mohawk* (progress of the species and small farm interest,) said, on the other hand, that this Lieutenant Hillyar was one of those men who had been unjustly hunted out of his native land by the jealousy of an accursed and corrupt aristocracy, in consequence of his liberal tendencies, and his fellow-feeling for the (so-called) lower orders. And this abominable *Mohawk*, evidently possessed of special knowledge, in trying to prove the habitual condescension of George Hillyar towards his inferiors, did so rake up all his old blackguardisms that Mr. Secretary Oxton was as near mad as need be.

It is hardly necessary to say that, when poor little Gerty Neville heard the news, George Hillyar was, to her, transformed from a persecuted, ill-used, misunderstood man, into a triumphant hero. She threw herself, sobbing, into her sister's arms, and said, —

"Now, Aggy! Now, who was right? Was not I wiser than you, my sister? My noble hero! Two to one, Agnes, and he is so calm and modest about it. Why, James and you were blind. Did not *I* see what he was; am *I* a fool?"

Mrs. Oxton was very much inclined to think she was. She was puzzled by this undoubted act of valor on George Hillyar's part. She had very good sense of her own, and the most profound belief in one of the cleverest men in the world, — her husband. Her husband's distrust of the man had reacted on her; so, in the midst of Gerty's wild enthusiasm, she could only hope that things would go right, though she tried to be enthusiastic for Gerty's sake.

Things were very near going right just now. The Secretary and his wife knew too little of their man. The man's antecedents were terribly bad, but the man had fallen in love, and become a hero within a very few months. The Secretary knew men well enough, and knew how seldom they reformed after they had gone as far as (he feared) Lieutenant Hillyar had gone. Both Mr. and Mrs. Oxton were inclined to distrust and oppose him still, in spite of his act of heroism.

* The "squatters" of Australia are the great pastoral aristocrats, who lease immense tracts from government for pasturage. Some of them are immensely wealthy. I speak from recollection, when I say that one of Dr. Kerr's stations, on the Darling downs, when sold in 1854, contained 102,000 sheep, whose value at that time was about 25*s.* a piece. An improvement on Saville Row, decidedly.

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But the man himself meant well. There was just enough goodness and manhood left in him to fall in love with Gerty Neville: and a kind of reckless, careless pluck which had been a characteristic of him in his boyhood, had still remained to him. It had been latent, exhibiting itself only in causeless quarrels and headlong gaming, until it had been turned into a proper channel by his new passion, the only serious one of his life. The one cause combined with the other; golden opportunity came in his way: and suddenly he, who had been a distrusted and despised man all his life, found himself a hero, beloved by the beauty of the community, with every cloud cleared away from the future; a man whose name was mentioned by every mouth with enthusiastic praise. It was a glimpse of heaven. His eye grew brighter, his bearing more majestic, his heart softer towards his fellow-creatures. He was happy for the first time in his life. As the poor godless fellow put it to himself, his luck had turned at last.

But we must go a little way back in our story. While he and Mr. Oxton were still trying to make the wounded cadet comfortable, assistance arrived, and it was announced that the other bush-rangers were captured. (The cadet recovered, my dear madam, and is now the worthy and highly respected chief commissioner of police for Cooksland.) So the Secretary and the Lieutenant rode away together.

"I 'll tell you what I would do, Hillyar," said the Secretary; "I should ride down to Palmerston as quick as I could, and report this matter at head-quarters; you will probably get your Inspectorship, — I shall certainly see that you do. And I tell you what, I shall go with you myself. I must talk over this with the Governor at once. We can get on to my house to-night, and I shall be pleased to see you as my guest."

"*That* is very kind of you," said Hillyar.

"I cannot conceal from you," said the Secretary, with emphasis, "that I am aware of your having proposed yourself for my brother-in-law."

"I supposed you would know it by this time. I have laid my fortune and my title at Miss Neville's feet, and have been accepted."

"O Lord!" said the Secretary, as if he had a sudden twinge of toothache, "I know all about it. It is not your fortune nor your title I want to talk about. What sort of a name can you give her? Can you give her an unsullied name? I ask you as a man of the world, can you do that?"

"As a man of the world, hey?" said the Lieutenant; "then, as a man of the world, I should say that Miss Gertrude Neville had made a far better catch than any of her sisters; even a bet-

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ter catch, saving your presence, than her sister Agnes. Such is the idiotic state of English society, that a baronet of old creation with ten thousand a year, and a handsome lady-like wife, will be more *répandu* in London than a mere colonial official, whose rank is so little known in that benighted city, that on his last visit, the Mayor of Palmerston was sent down to dinner before him at Lady Noahsark's. If you choose to put it as a man of the world, there you are."

"The fellow don't want for wit," thought the Secretary. "I have got the dor this time." But he answered promptly,—

"That is all very fine, Hillyar; but you are under a cloud, you know."

"I must request you, once and forever, sir, not to repeat that assertion. I am under no cloud. I was fast and reckless in England, and I have been fast and reckless here. I shall be so no longer. I have neglected my police duties somewhat, though not so far as to receive anything more than an admonition. What man, finding himself an heir-expectant to a baronetcy and a fortune, would not neglect this miserable drudgery. What young fellow, receiving an allowance of three hundred a year, would have submitted to the drudgery of a cadetship for fourteen months? Answer me that, sir?"

The Secretary could n't answer that, but he thought,—"I wonder why he did it? I never thought of that before." He said aloud, "Your case certainly looks better than it did, Hillyar."

"Now hear me out," said George Hillyar. "My history is soon told. When I was seven years old my mother— Well, sir, look the other way,—she *bolted*."

"O, dear, dear me," said the Secretary. "O, pray don't go on, sir. I am so very sorry, Hillyar."

"Bolted, sir," repeated George, with an angry snarl, "and left me to be hated worse than poison by my father in consequence. How do you like that?"

There was a mist in the good Secretary's eyes; and in that mist he saw the dear, happy old manor-house in Worcestershire; a dark, mysterious, solemn house, beneath the shadowing elms; the abode of gentle, graceful, domestic love for centuries. And he saw a bent figure with a widow's cap upon her gray hair, which wandered still among the old flower-beds, and thought for many an hour in the autumn day, whether her brave son would return from his honor and wealth, in far off Australia, and give her one sweet kiss, before she lay down to sleep beside his father, in the quiet churchyard in the park.

"No more, sir!" said the Secretary. "Not another word. I ask your pardon. Be silent."

George would not.

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"That is my history. The reason I stayed in the police at all, was that I might stand well with my father; that he might not think I had gone so utterly to the devil as he wished: for he married again, — married a milkmaid, or worse, — to spite me. And the son he had by her is, according to all accounts, idolized, while I am left here to fight my way alone. I hate that boy, and I will make him feel it."

His case would have stood better without this last outbreak of temper which jarred sharply on the Secretary's sentimental mood. But he had made his case good. The fight was over. That night he was received at the Secretary's station as an accepted suitor. The next he dined at Government House, and sat all the evening in a corner with Lady Rumbolt (the Governor's wife), and talked of great people in England, about whom he knew just enough to give her ladyship an excuse for talking about them, which she liked better than anything in the world, after gardening and driving. So nothing could be more charming; and the Secretary, seeing that it was no use to struggle, gave it up, and determined to offer no opposition to the marriage of his sister-in-law to a man who would be a wealthy baronet in England.

And this is what made him so excessively mad about those abominable, indiscreet leaders in the *Mohawk*, in praise of the gallant Lieutenant. He had used strong language about the *Mohawk* continually, ever since the first number appeared, in the early days of the colony, printed on whitey-brown sugar-paper, with a gross libel upon himself in the first six lines of its leader. But it was nothing to the language he used now. Mr. Edward Fitzgerald Emmet, the editor of the *Mohawk*, found out that he was annoying the Secretary, and continued his allusions in a more offensive form. Until, so says report, Miss Lesbia Burke let him know that, if he continued to annoy James Oxton, she would horsewhip him. Whereupon the *Mohawk* was dumb.

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CHAPTER XII.

DISPOSES OF SAMUEL BURTON FOR A TIME.

THE evening after the fight with the bush-rangers, the affair was getting noisily discussed in the principal men's hut at the Barker's. The large room, earth-floored, with walls and roof of wood, colored by the smoke to a deep mahogany, was lit up by the mighty blaze of a wood-fire in the great chimney at one end, for the south wind had come up, and the night was chilly. Five or six men were seated on logs and stools round the chimney, eating their supper, and one, who had finished his, had got into bed, and was comfortably smoking and joining in the conversation. They were an honest, good-looking set of fellows enough, for in Cooksland and South Australia, the convict element is very small; and the appearance of rude plenty and honest comfort which was over the whole scene, was pleasant enough to witness by a belated and wearied traveller.

Such a one came to the door that evening, and brought his evil face among them. It was the convict that the Secretary had passed on the sands; it was Samuel Burton.

The cattle and sheep dogs, which lay about in the yard, bayed him furiously, but he passed through them unheeding, and, opening the door, stood in the entry, saying:

"Can I stay here to-night, mates?"

"Surely," said the old hut-keeper, shading his face with his hand. "You must be a stranger to Barker's, to ask such a question. Come in, lad."

The young man who was setting in the best place by the fire, got up to give it to him. Each one of the men murmured a welcome to him as he came towards the fire; and then, as the fire-light fell upon his face, they saw that he was a convict.

Now and then you will find a jail-bird who will, in appearance, pass muster among honest men; but in this case the word "Old hand" was too plainly written on the face to be mistaken. They insensibly altered their demeanor towards him at once. To their kind hospitality, which had been offered to him before they saw what he was, was now added respectful deference, and a scarcely concealed desire to propitiate. Seven honest good fellows, were respectfully afraid of one rogue; and the rogue was perfectly aware of the fact, and treated them accordingly; much as a hawk would treat a cote-full of pigeons, if he found it conve-

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nient to pass the night among them. The penniless, tattered felon was a sort of lord among them.

Attribute it to what you will, it is so. A better set of fellows than the honest emigrants, generally, don't exist; but their superstitious respect for an old convict is almost pitiable. I fancy, if the Devil were to take it into his head to make thirteenth at a dinner-party, that we should be studiously polite to him, till we had got rid of him; and be careful not to wound his feelings by any allusion to the past.

They put food and tea before him, and he ate and drank voraciously. The hut-keeper did not wait to ask him if he had tobacco: to extort from him what is the last, most humiliating confession of destitution, in the bush; but, seeing him look round, put a fig and a pipe in his hand. After he had lit it, he began to talk for the first time.

"I suppose," he said, "none of you chaps know the names of the fellows who got bailed up by young Hillyar this morning?"

The hut-keeper answered, — a quiet, gentle old man, whom the others called Daddy, —

"I knew two on 'em. There was Mike Tiernay. He was assigned to Carstairs on the North Esk one time, I mind."

"Hallo!" said Burton. "Are *you*, Stringy Bark?"

"I am from Van Diemen's Land," said the old man, quietly. "But an emigrant."

The convict gave a grunt of disappointment.

"The other one I knew," continued the old man, "was Wallaby Thompson."

It is curious that the old man had, before the arrival of Burton, been entertaining the young men with the lives and crimes of these abominable blackguards. Now, before the representative of their class, he spoke as though it were a liberty to mention the gentlemen's names.

"Wallaby Thompson, eh?" said the convict. "He was an honest, good fellow, and I am sorry for him. I never knew that fellow do a bad action in my life. He was as true as steel. Old Carboys sent his mate for trial, and old Carboys was found in the bush with his throat cut. That's what *I* call a man."

Burton was showing off before these emigrants for purposes of his own. Cutting throats was not his special temptation; and he, probably, never saw Wallaby Thompson, Esq., in his life; in fact, his claiming acquaintance with that gentleman was strong evidence that he knew nothing about him; he being a mere liar and rogue, not dangerous unless desperate. But he took these simple emigrants in by a clever imitation of a bush-ranger's ferocity, and they believed in him.

"Is young Hillyar at the station here, or at the barracks, to-night?" he asked.

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"The Lieutenant is gone down to Palmerston, this morning, with the Secretary," was the answer.

Burton was evidently staggered by this intelligence. He kept his countenance, however, and asked, as coolly as he could, when he was expected back.

"Back!" said the old man; "Lord love you, he'll never come back *here* no more. At any rate, he'll be made Inspector for this job; and so you won't see him *here* again."

"How far is it to Palmerston?" asked Burton.

"Two hundred and thirty miles."

He said nothing in answer to this. He sat and thought as he smoked. Two hundred and thirty miles! He penniless and shoeless, not in the best of health, having the dread of a return of dysentery! It could not be done,—it could not be done. He *must* take service, and then it could not be done for six months; he could not sign for less time than that. He could have cursed his ill luck, but he was not given to cursing on occasions where thought was required. He made his determination at once, and acted on it; in spite of that curious pinched-up lower jaw of his; with quite as much decision as would his old master and enemy, Sir George Hillyar, with his broad, bull-dog jowl.

"Are there any of — my sort — here about?" he asked, with an affectedly surly growl.

There is no euphemism invented yet for the word "convict," which is available among the laboring class of Australia, when a convict is present. Those who think they know something of them, might fancy that "Old hand," Vandemonian," or even "Sydney Sider," were not particularly offensive. Those who know them better know that the use of either three expressions, in the presence of one of these sensitive gentlemen, means instant assault and battery. None of the hands in the hut would have ventured on anything of the kind for worlds, but now Burton had put it in his own form, and must be answered.

It appeared that there was a hoary old miscreant of a shepherd, who was, if the expression might be allowed, "Stringy Bark," and who had quarrelled with his hut-keeper. Burton said he would see about it, and did so, the next day. Barker père, a fine old fellow, was of opinion that if you were unfortunate enough to have one convict on the place, it was better that you should catch another to bear him company. He therefore was not sorry to avail himself of Samuel Burton's services, in the capacity of hut-keeper to the old convict-shepherd he had on the run already.

"Confound 'em," said old Barker; "shut 'em up together, and let 'em corrupt one another. I am glad this scoundrel has come to ask for work. I should have had to send old Tom about his

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business if he had n't, and old Tom is the best shepherd I've got; but I never could have asked an honest man to cook for old Tom. No. The appearance of this fellow is a special providence. I should have had to send old Tom to the right-about."

So Samuel Burton, by reason of the badness of his shoes, and a general seediness of character, had to take service with Mr. Barker. He had met with a disappointment in not meeting with George Hillyar, but on the whole he was not sorry to get a chance of lying by for a little. The fact was that he had, six weeks before this, lost his character, and travelling was not safe for a time. He had been transported and reconvicted in the colony, but his character had been good until, as I say, six weeks before this, when he turned Queen's evidence on the great bank forgery case. That act not only ruined his character, (among the convicts I mean, of course,) but rendered travelling in lonely places, for a time, before men had had time to forget, a dangerous business. Therefore he accepted Mr. Barker's service with alacrity, and so George Hillyar heard nothing of him for six peaceful months.

CHAPTER XIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE GOLDEN THREAD BEGINS TO RUN OFF THE REEL.

Could one ever have been happy in such a squalid unromantic place? Among such sounds, such smells, such absence of fresh air and sunshine, with poverty and vulgarity in its grossest forms on every side of one, — shrill Doll Tearsheet, distinctly and painfully audible round the corner, telling the nuthook that he had lied, and that sort of thing, all day long; and Pistol, the cutpurse, ruffling and bullying it under the gas-lamp by the corner, from cockshoot to curfew, at which latter time we used to be rid of him for an hour or so? Could any one have had a happy home amidst all this squalor and blackguardism? And could any one, having gained wealth and honor, ever feel a longing kindness for the old, for the cramped horizon, and the close atmosphere, of the place one once called home?

Yes. I often feel it now. The other day the summer wind was still, and the summer clouds slept far aloft, above the highest boughs of the silent forest; and peace and silence were over everything as I rode slowly on among the clustering flowers.

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And then and there the old Chelsea life came back into my soul and pervaded it completely, and the past drove out the present so utterly and entirely that, although my mortal body — which, when no longer useful, must perish and rot, like one of the fallen logs around me — was passing through the glorious Australian forest, yet the immortal part of me had travelled back into the squalid old street, and *I* was there once again.

Dear old place! I can love it still. I were but an ingrate if I could not love it better than all other places. After we had been out here ten years, Joe went back on business, and went to see it. A certain change, which we shall hear of, had taken place; the old neighbors were gone, and Chelsea, so far as we cared about it, was desolate. But, as Joe leant lonely against the railings in the new Paulton Square, he heard a cry coming from towards the river, which thrilled to his heart as he came nearer and nearer. What was it, think you. It was old Alsop, the fishmonger, bawling out, as of old, the audacious falsehood that his soles were alive. It was nothing more than that, but it was the last of the old familiar Chelsea sounds which was left. When Joe told us this story we were all (simple souls) very much moved. My father said, huskily, that "there were worse chaps than Bill Alsop, mind you, though he did not uphold him in all things," which I was glad to hear. As for my mother, she dissolved into such a flood of tears that the recently-invented pocket-handkerchief was abandoned as useless, and the old familiar apron was adopted instead. Such is the force of habit, that my mother cannot cry comfortably without an apron. The day I was married, Emma had a deal of trouble with her on this account. It was evident that she wanted to wipe her eyes on her horribly expensive mauve satin gown, and at last compromised the matter by crying into her black lace shawl, which was of about as much use as a fishing net, God bless her.

I have, as I have said, an affection for the old place still; and, when I think of it at its brightest, when I love it best of all, it comes back to me on a fine September evening, on the evening after Joe and I met with our wonderful adventures at Stanlake.

I think I have mentioned before that my father used to relieve me in the shop when he had done his tea; and so I used to have my tea after all the others had done, — at which times my sister and I used to have a pleasant talk, while she waited on me.

Latterly I had always had a companion. It was an unfortunate business, but my brother Harry had acquired a sort of habit of getting kept in at school, nearly every day. My mother contrived a meeting with the school-master, and asked him why. The answer was, that he was a good little fellow, but that he *would* draw on his slate. The evening next after she had

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gained this intelligence, we, all sitting round the fire and expecting to hear the story of how my father came home tipsy the night the Reform Bill was passed, were astonished to find that my mother had composed, and was prepared with, an entirely new story, in the awful-example style of fiction, which she there and then told us. It appeared that she knew a little girl (mark how she wrapped it up) as drew on her slate, and was took with the chalkstone gout in the jints of her fingers. And, while that child was a droring, the chalkstones kep' dropping from her knuckles, and the children kep' picking on 'em up and drawing devils on the desks. Harry was at the time both alarmed and distressed at this story. But it had no effect. The next day he drew a devil so offensive that he was not only kept in, but caned.

So Harry, being late from school, was my companion at tea, and sat beside me. Frank, who adored Harry because Harry used to morphise Frank's dreams for him on slates and bits of paper, stayed with him. Fred, the big-headed, who was brought into the world apparently to tumble down stairs, and to love and cuddle everybody he met, sat on my knee and pulled my hair in a contemplative way; while Emma sat beside me sewing, and softly murmured out the news of the day, carefully avoiding any mention of the Avery catastrophe.

Mr. Pistol and Mr. Bardolph had been took by the police for a robbery in the Fulham Road, and Mrs. Quickly was ready to swear on her Bible oath, that they were both in bed and asleep at the time. Polly Ager had been kept in at school for pinching Sally Holmes. Tom Cole was going to row for Dogget's coat and badge, &c., &c.

Frank told us, that the evening before last he had walked on to Battersea Bridge with Jerry Chittle, and to the westward he had seen in the sky, just at sunset, an army of giants, dressed in purple and gold, pursuing another army of giants dressed in gray, who, as the sun went down, seemed to turn on their pursuers. He said that the thunder-storm which happened that night was no thunder-storm at all, but the battle of these two armies of giants over our heads. He requested Harry to draw this scene for him on his slate, which Harry found a difficulty in doing.

I was thinking whether or no I could think of anything to say concerning this giant story, and was coming to the conclusion that I could n't, when I looked up and saw Erne Hillyar and Joe in the doorway.

I saw Erne's noble face light up as he saw me. "Here he is" was all he said; but, from the way he said it, I knew that he had come after *me*.

I stood up, I remember, and touched my forehead, but he came

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quickly towards me and took my hand. "I want to be friends with you, Jim," he said; "I know you and I shall suit one another. Let me come and see you sometimes."

I did not know what to say, at least not in words; but as he took my hand, my eyes must have bid him welcome, for he laughed and said, "That is right. I knew you would like me, I saw it yesterday."

And then he turned on Emma, who was standing, respectful and still, beside me, with her hands closed before her, holding her work. And their eyes met; and Erne loved her, and has never loved any other woman since.

"This must be your sister," said Erne. "There is no doubt about that. Jim's sister, will you shake hands with me?"

She shook hands with him, and smiled her gentlest, kindest smile in his face.

"I am so glad," she said, "that you want to make friends with Jim. You cannot have a better friend than he, sir."

Here Joe came back, and whispered to me that he had been to father, and told him that a young gentleman had come to see me, and that father had said I was to stay where I was. So there we children sat all together; Erne on one side of me, and Emma on the other, talking about such things as children (for we were but little more) will talk about, — Erne sometimes leaning over me to speak to Emma, and waiting eagerly for her answer. Fred got on his knee, and twined his little fingers into his curling hair, and laid his big head upon Erne's shoulder. Frank and Harry drew their stools to his feet, and listened. We were a happy group. Since the wild, petulant Earl had built that great house, nigh three hundred years before, and had paced, and fumed, and fretted up and down that self-same floor, there never had been gathered, I dare swear, a happier group of children under the time-stained rafters of that room, than were we that night in the deepening twilight.

Joe and Erne talked most. Joe spoke of the wonderful old church hard by, a city of the mighty dead, and their monuments, where there were innumerable dark, dim recesses, crowded by tombs and effigies. Here lay the headless trunk of Sir Thomas More, — not under the noble monument erected by himself in the chancel before his death, but "neare the middle of the south wall," — indebted to a stranger for a simple slab over his remains. In this chapel, too, knelt the Duchess of Northumberland, with her five daughters, all with clasped hands, praying for the soul of their unhappy father. One of them, Joe could not tell which, must have married Arthur Pole. Here lay Lord and Lady Dacre, with their dogs watching at their feet, under their many-colored canopy; and last, not least, here knelt

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John Hillyar, Esq., father of the first baronet, with his three simple-looking sons in ruffs, opposite his wife Eleanor, with her six daughters, and her two dead babies on the cushion before her.

"Four hundred years of memory," continued Joe, "are crowded into that dark old church, and the great flood of change beats round the walls, and shakes the door in vain, but never enters. The dead stand thick together there, as if to make a brave resistance to the moving world outside, which jars upon their slumber. It is a church of the dead. I cannot fancy any one being married in that church, — its air would chill the boldest bride that ever walked to the altar. No; it is a place for old people to creep into, and pray, until their prayer is answered, and they sleep with the rest."

"*Hallo!*" I said to myself, "*Hal-lo!* this is the same young gentleman who said of Jerry Chittle yesterday, 'That it worn't no business of his'n,' and would probably do so again to-morrow if necessary." Both Emma and I had noticed lately that Joe had two distinct ways of speaking; this last was the best example of his later style that we had yet heard. The young eagle was beginning to try his wings.

Then Erne began to talk. "Did you know, Jim and Joe, that this Church Place belonged to us before the Sloane Stanleys bought it?"

Joe had been told so by Mr. Faulkner.

"It seems so very strange to find you living *here*, Jim. So very strange. Do you know that my father never will mention the name of the house."

"Why not, sir!" I asked wondering.

"Why, my gentle Hammersmith, it has been such a singularly unlucky house to all who have lived in it. Do you know why?"

I could not guess.

"Church property, my boy. Built on the site of a cell of Westminster, granted by Henry to Essex in 1535. Tom Cromwell got it first and lost it; and then Walter Devereux bought it back for name's sake, because it had belonged to an Essex once before, I suppose; and then Robert built the house in one of his fantastic moods. Pretty luck *they* had with it, — Devereux the younger will tell you about that. Then *we* got it, and a nice mess *we* made of it, — there was never a generation without a tragedy. It is a cursed place to the Hillyars. My father would be out of his mind if he knew I were here. The last tragedy was the most fearful."

Frank immediately got up on Emma's lap. Erne did not want to be asked to tell us all about it.

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"In 1686," he said, "it was the dower house of Jane, Dowager Lady Hillyar. Her son, Sir Cheyne Hillyar, was a bigoted papist, and, thinking over the misfortunes which had happened to the family lately, attributed them to the possession of this Church property, and determined that it should be restored forthwith to the Church, even though it were to that pestilent heretic Adam Littleton, D. D., the then rector of Chelsea; hoping, however, says my father, to see the same reverend Doctor shortly replaced, by an orthodox gentleman from the new Jesuit school in Savoy. But there was a hitch in the proceedings, my dear Jim. There was a party in the bargain who had not been sufficiently considered or consulted. Jane, Lady Hillyar, was, though a strong Catholic, a very obstinate old lady indeed. She refused, in spite of all the spiritual artillery that her son could bring to bear upon her, to have the transfer made during her lifetime; and, while the dispute was hot between them, her son, Sir Cheyne died.

"Then the old lady's conscience began to torment her. She believed that the house ought to be restored to the Church; but her avarice was opposed to this step, and between her avarice and superstition she went mad.

"All her children had deserted her, save one, a hunchbacked grand-daughter, who came here and lived with her for three months, and who died here. After this poor girl's death, the old woman kept no servants in the house at night, but used to sleep in a room at the top of the house, with her money under her bed. Is there such a room?"

"Yes," I said, "and her ghost walks there now."

"It should," said Erne, "by all reasons, for she was murdered there. They found her dead in the morning, on the threshold between two rooms. She had not been to bed, for she was dressed, — dressed in her old gray silk gown, and even had her black mittens on."

Nothing could shake my faith in the ghost after this. The fact of Erne and ourselves having both heard the same silly story, from apparently different, but really from the same sources, confirmed it beyond suspicion in my mind. The dread I had always had of that room at the top of the house, in which Reuben lived, now deepened into horror, — into a horror which was only intensified by what happened there afterwards. Even now, though the room has ceased to exist, the horror most certainly has not.

"But come," said Erne, "let me see this house, which has been so fatal to my family. The weird cannot extend to me, for we own it no longer. What do you say, Emma; has the luck turned?"

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"I fear I must keep you ten years, or perhaps fifty, waiting for an answer," she said. "But, even then, I could only tell you what I can now, that your fate is to a very great extent in your own hands."

"You don't believe in destiny, or anything of that sort, then?" said Erne.

"Not the least in the world," she said.

"Then you are no true Mussulwoman," said Erne. "Let us come up stairs, and see the haunted mansion. Come on, Emma."

So we went into the empty room up stairs, and Emma showed him the view westward. While they stood together at the window, the sun smote upon their faces with his last ray of glory, and then went down behind the trees; so that, when Erne, Joe, and I started together up stairs to see Reuben's room, it grew darker and darker each step we went.

"A weird, dull place," said Erne, looking around. "There is another room inside this, and the old lady was murdered on the threshold. Does your cousin live here all alone?"

"All alone."

"He must be rather dull."

"The merriest fellow alive."

When we came down stairs, we found my father and mother awaiting us. My mother seemed very much delighted at my having picked up such a fine acquaintance; and my father said, —

"Sir, you are welcome. I am glad to see, sir, that my boy Jim is appreciated by gentlemen as well able to judge as yourself." And then my father proceeded to define the principal excellences of my character. I am sure I hope he was right. My crowning virtue, it appeared, — the one that contained the others, and surpassed them, — was, that I was "all there." My father assured Erne that he would find that to be the case. That no one had ever ventured to say that it was not the case. That if any one *did* say so, and was in anyways prepared to maintain his opinion, he would be glad to hear his reasons, and so on; turning the original proposition, about my being "all there," over and over, and inside out, a dozen times. Erne had no idea what he meant, but he knew it was something highly complimentary to me, and so he said he perfectly agreed with my father, and, that he had taken notice of that particular point in my character the very moment he saw me, which was carrying a polite fiction somewhat dangerously far. At last he said he must go, and, turning to my father, asked if he might come again. My father begged he would honor him whenever he pleased, and then he went away, and I walked with him.

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"I've run away, Jim," he said, as soon as we were in the street. "I ran away to see you."

I ventured to express a wish that, at some future time, he might be induced to go back again.

"Yes," he said, "I shall go back to-morrow. I sleep at a friend's house here in Chelsea, and I shall go back to-morrow, but I shall come again. Often, I hope."

When I got home my father was sitting up alone smoking. I sat down opposite to him, and in a few minutes he said, —

"A fine young chap that, old man!"

"Very, indeed," I said, slightly anxious about the results of the interview.

"Yes! A fine, handsome, manly lad," continued he. "What's his name, by-the-by?"

I saw the truth must come out.

"His name is Hillyar," I said.

"Christian name?"

"Erne."

"Then you went to Stanlake yesterday?"

"Yes," I said. "We wanted to see it after what you said, and so we went."

My father looked very serious, and sat smoking a long time; at last he said, —

"Jim, you mind the night you was bound?"

"Yes."

"And what I told you about Samuel Burton and his young master, that carried on so hard?"

I remembered every word.

"This young Erne Hillyar is his brother. That's why your mother cried when Stanlake was spoke of; and all this has come out of those dratted water-lilies."

And so we went to bed; but I could not sleep at first. I lay awake, thinking of my disobedience, and wondering what complication of results would follow from it. But at last I fell asleep, saying to myself, "Will he come again to-morrow? when will he come again?"

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE GLEAM OF THE AUTUMN SUNSET.

"On the 27th, at the Cathedral, by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Palmerston, assisted by the Very Reverend Dean Maberly, of N. S. W., and the Rev. Minimus Smallchange of St. Micros, Little Creek, George Hillyar, Esq., Inspector of Police for the Bumbleoora District, eldest son of Sir George Hillyar, of Stanlake, England, to Gertrude, sixth and last remaining daughter of the late James Neville, Esq. of Neville's Gap."

That was the way the *Sentinel* announced it, — "last remaining daughter." In England, one would have thought that all the other daughters were dead! Australians understood the sentence better. It merely meant that all the other sisters were married; that the Miss Nevilles were exhausted; that there were n't any more of them left; that, if you wanted to marry one of these ever so much now, you could n't do it; and that the market was free to the most eligible young ladies next in succession. That was all the *Sentinel* meant. Dead! Quotha!

Some of the young ladies said: Their word, — they were surprised. That, if you had gone down on your knees now, and told them that Gerty was ambitious and heartless, they would not have believed it. That, if you had told them that she was a poor little thing with no manners; that she never could dress herself in colors, and so stuck to white; that she was the color of a cockatoo when she sat still, and got to be the color of a king-parrot the moment she began to dance; that she was a forward little thing, and a shy little thing, and a bold little thing, and an artful little thing, and that her spraining her ankle at the ball at Government-House was all an excuse to get on the sofa beside Lord Edward Staunton, — they would have believed all this. But they never, never could have believed that she would have sold herself to that disreputable, smooth-faced creature of a Hillyar, for the sake of his prospective title.

But other young ladies said that Gerty was the sweetest, kindest, best little soul that ever was born. That, if Inspector Hillyar did anything to make her unhappy, he ought to be torn to pieces by wild horses. But that there must be something good in him, or Gerty could never have loved him as she did.

The Secretary, who was cross and uneasy over the whole mat-

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ter, on being told by his wife about this young-lady tattle, said that the detractors were all of them the daughters of the tradesmen and small farmers, — the female part of the Opposition. But this was not true, for Gerty had many friends even among the Opposition. Miss Hurtle, daughter of the radical member for North Palmerston, (also an ironmonger in Banks Street,) behaved much like Miss Swartz in *Vanity Fair*. She was so overcome at the wedding that she incautiously began to sob; her sobs soon developed themselves into a long discordant bellow, complicated with a spasmodic tattoo of her toes against the front of the pew. The exhibition of smelling-salts only rendering her black in the face; they had to resort to stimulants. And, as the procession went out, they were met by the sexton, with brandy-and-water. The Secretary laughed aloud, and his wife was glad to hear him laugh, for he had been, as she expressed, "as black as thunder" all the morning.

Yes, for good or for evil, it was all over and done; and one might as well laugh as cry. Gerty Neville was Mrs. Hillyar, and the best must be made of it.

The best did not seem so very bad. The Hillyars came and stayed with the Oxtons at the Secretary's house near town, after spending their honeymoon in Sydney, and every day they stayed there the Secretary's brow grew smoother, and he appeared more reconciled to what had happened.

Gerty seemed as bright as the morning-star. A most devoted and proud little wife, proud of herself, proud of her foresight and discretion in making such a choice, and, above all, proud of her cool, calm, gentlemanly husband. Her kind little heart was overflowing with happiness, which took the form of loving-kindness for all her fellow-creatures, from the Governor down to the meanest native who lay by the creekside.

"*She* afraid of her terrible father-in-law," she would say, laughing; "let him meet her face to face, and she would bring him on his knees in no time." She was so very lovely, that Mr. and Mrs. Oxton really thought that she might assist to bring about a reconciliation between father and son, though George, who knew more than they, professed to have but little hopes of any change taking place in his father's feelings towards him.

A great and steady change for the better was taking place in George himself. There could be no doubt that he was most deeply and sincerely in love with his wife; and also that, *with her*, this new life did not, as the Secretary had feared, bore and weary him. It was wonderfully pleasant and peaceful. He had never had *repose* before in his life; and now he began to feel the full beauty of it.

The Secretary saw all this; but his dread was that this new

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state of being, had come to him too late in life to become habitual. There was the danger.

Still the improvement was marked. He lost the old impatient insolent fall in the eyes when addressed; he lost his old contradictory manner altogether; his voice grew more gentle, and his whole air more cheerful; and, lastly, for the first time in his life, he began to pay little attentions to women. He began to squire Mrs. Oxton about, and to buy flowers for her, and all that sort of thing, and to show her, in a mute sort of way, that he approved of her; and he made himself so agreeable to all his wife's friends that they began to think that she had not done so very badly after all.

He very seldom laughed heartily. Indeed, what little humor he had was dry and caustic, and he never unbent himself to, or was easy and confidential with, any human being, — unless it were his wife, when they were alone. His treatment of the Secretary was respectful, nay, even *for him*, affectionate; but he was never free with him. He would talk over his affairs with him, would discuss the chances of a reconciliation with his father, and so on; yet there was no warmth of confidence between them. Neither ever called the other "old fellow," or made the most trifling joke at the other's expense. If you had told the Secretary that he still distrusted George Hillyar, he would have denied it. But, generous and freehearted as the Secretary was, there was a grain of distrust of his brother-in-law in his heart still.

Thus, even at his best, but one human being *loved* the poor fellow, and that one being was his wife, who, for some reason, adored him. It is quite easy to see that in the times before his marriage he may have been a most unpopular person. Here he is before us now, for the six months succeeding his marriage, a tall, handsome man, of about thirty-one, with a rather pale, hairless face, somewhat silent, somewhat reserved, but extremely self-possessed; very polite and attentive in small things, but yet unable to prevent your seeing that his politeness cost him an effort, — a man striving to forget the learning of a lifetime.

Shortly after his marriage, he wrote to his father: —

"My Dear Sir, — We have been so long and so hopelessly estranged that I have considerable difficulty in knowing in what terms I ought to address you.

"Since I left Wiesbaden, and requested you in future to pay the annual sum of money, you are kind enough to allow me, into the bank at Sydney, none but the most formal communications have passed between us. The present one shall be as formal as possible, but I fear will trench somewhat on family matters.

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"I have been four years in the police service of this colony, and have at last, by a piece of service of which I decline to speak, raised myself to the highest rank obtainable in it.

"In addition to this piece of intelligence, I have to inform you that I have made a most excellent marriage. Any inquiries you may make about the future Lady Hillyar can only be answered in one way.

"Hoping that your health is good, I beg to remain,

"Your obedient son,

"GEORGE HILLYAR."

The answer came in time, as follows:—

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—I had heard of your brilliant gallantry, and also of your marriage, from another source, before your letter arrived. I highly approve of your conduct in both cases.

"In the place of the £300 which you have been receiving hitherto from me, you will in future receive £1000 annually. I hope the end has come at last to the career of vice and selfish dissipation in which you have persisted so long.

"I confess that I am very much pleased at what I hear of you this last six months (I am well-informed about every movement you make): I had utterly given you up. The way to good fame seems to be plainly before you. I wish I could believe that none of this enormous crop of wild oats, which you have so diligently sown for the last eighteen years, would come up and bear terrible fruit. I wish I could believe that.

"Meanwhile, if your duties call you to England, I will receive you and your wife. But take this piece of advice seriously to heart. Make friends and a career where you are. Mind that.

"Your affectionate father,

"GEORGE HILLYAR."

A cold, cruel, heartless letter. Not one word of tender forgiveness; not one word of self-blame for the miserable mistakes that he had made with his son in times gone by: the hatred which he felt for him showing out in the prophecies of unknown horrors in what seemed a brighter future. The devil, which had not looked out of George Hillyar's eyes for six months past, looked out now, and he swore aloud.

"'Make friends and a career where you are.' So he is going to disinherit me in favor of that cursed young toad Erne."

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CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH THE SNAKE CREEPS OUT OF THE GRASS.

THE place in which he had received this letter was the post-office at Palmerston, one of the principal public buildings of that thriving capital, — a majestic and imposing pile of galvanized iron, roofed with tin, twenty feet long, surmounted by a pediment, the apex of which rose fifteen feet from the level of Banks Street, and carried a weathercock.

The mail was just in, and the place was crowded. Roaring for his orderly was of very little use; it only raised a few eager eyes impatiently from their letters, or made a few disappointed idlers wonder what the Inspector was hollering after. His orderly had probably got a letter, and was reading it in some secret corner. He would wait for him.

The devil had been in him a few minutes ago; but as he stood and waited there, in the sweltering little den called the post-office, with all the eager readers of letters around him, the devil began to be beat out again. There was an atmosphere in that miserable little hot tin-kettle of a post-office which the devil can't stand at all, — the atmosphere of home. Old loves, old hopes, old friends, old scenes, old scents, old sounds, are threads which, though you draw them finer than the finest silk, are still stronger than iron. Did you ever hear the streams talk to you in May, when you went a-fishing? Did you ever hear what the first rustle of the summer-leaves said to you in June, when you went a-courting? Did you ever hear, as a living voice, the southwest wind among the bare ash-boughs in November, when you were out a-shooting? If you have imagination enough to put a voice into these senseless sounds of nature, I should like to stand with you in the Melbourne post-office on a mail day, and see what sort of voice would speak to you out of the rustling of a thousand fluttering letters, held by trembling fingers, and gazed on by faces which, however coarse and ugly, let the news be good or bad, grow more soft and gentle as the news is read.

Poor George Hillyar. His letter had no hope or comfort in it; and yet, by watching the readers of the other letters, and seeing face after face light up, he got more quiet, less inclined to be violent and rash, less inclined to roar for his orderly, and make a fool of himself before Gerty. He leant against an iron pillar, and fixed his attention on a good-natured-looking young man before him, who was devouring an ill-written, blotted letter with an

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eagerness and a delight which made his whole face wreathe itself into one very large smile.

He was pleased to look at him, and looked at him more earnestly. But, while he looked at him, he found that he could not concentrate his attention on him. He tried to do so, for this young fellow, by reason of a deficient education, was enjoying his letter amazingly; he was reaping all the pleasures of anticipation and fruition at one and the same time. When he began a sentence, following the words with a grimy forefinger, he grinned, because he felt certain that something good was coming; when he had spelt through it he grinned wider still, because it surpassed his expectations. Once, after finishing one of these hard-spelt sentences, he looked round radiantly on the crowd, and said, confidentially: "I told you so. I know'd she'd have him!"

At this gushing piece of confidence to an unsympathizing crowd, poor George Hillyar felt as if he would have liked to meet this young man's eyes and smile at him. But he could not. Somehow, another pair of eyes came between him and everything else, — eyes which he could not identify among the crowd, yet which he could feel, and which produced a sensation of sleepy petulance with which he was very familiar. He had read some account of the fascination of snakes, and because it seemed a bizarre, and rather wicked sort of amusement, he had tried it for himself. He used to go out from the barracks on Sunday afternoon, find a black snake among the stony ridges, engage its attention, and stare at it. The snake would lie motionless, with its beady eyes fixed on him. The fearful stillness of the horrible brute, which carried instant death in its mouth, would engage him deeply; and the wearying attention of his eye, expecting some sudden motion of the reptile, would begin to tell upon the brain, and make the watcher, as I have said before, petulant and dull. At length the snake, gathering confidence from his stillness, would gleam and rustle in every coil, stretch out its quivering neck, and attempt flight. Then his suppressed anger would break forth, and he would arise and smite it, almost careless, for the moment, whether he died himself or no.*

He passed out of the crowd, and came into the portico; the people were standing about, still reading their letters, and his own orderly was sitting with his feet loose in his stirrups, nearly doubled up in his saddle, reading his letter too, while he held the rein of George Hillyar's horse loosely over his arm. The flies

* This is my theory about snake-fascination. The above are the only results I ever arrived at (except a creeping in the calves of my legs, and an intense desire to run away). Dr. Holmes don't quite agree. But I will publicly retract all I have said, if he will promise not to try any further experiments with his dreadful crotuli. The author of "Elsie Venner" is far too precious a person for that sort of thing.

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were troublesome, and sometimes the led horse would give such a jerk with his head as would nearly pull the letter out of the orderly's hand; but he did not notice it. He sat doubled up on his saddle, with a radiant eager smile on his face, and read.

Time was when poor Hillyar would have sworn at him, would have said that the force was going to the devil, because a cadet dared to read a letter on duty. But those times were gone by for the present. George Hillyar had been a bully, but was a bully no longer. He waited till his orderly should have finished his letter, and waited the more readily because he felt that those two strange eyes, of which he had been clearly conscious, were plaguing him no more.

So he waited until his orderly had done his letter before he approached him. The orderly, a gentle-looking English lad, with a kind, quiet face, looked on his advance with dismay. He had committed a slight breach of discipline in reading his sister's letter while on duty in the public streets; and Bully Hillyar, the man who never spared or forgave, had caught him. It was a week's arrest.

Nevertheless, he looked bright, pushed the letter into his breast, and wheeled the led horse round ready for the Inspector to mount. He *knew*, this sagacious creature, that he was going to catch it, and, so to speak, put up a moral umbrella against the storm of profane oaths which he *knew* would follow.

Will you conceive his astonishment when the Inspector, instead of blaspheming at him, took his curb down a link, and said over the saddle, preparing to mount, "What sort of news, Dickenson? Good news, hey?"

Judging by former specimens of George Hillyar's tender mercies, the orderly conceived this to be a kind of diabolical chaff or irony, preparatory to utter verbal demolition and ruin. He feebly said that he was very sorry.

"Pish, man! I am not chaffing. Have you got good news in your letter, hey?"

The astonished and still-distrusting orderly said, "Very good news, sir, thank you."

"Hah!" said George Hillyar. "I have n't. What 's your news? Come, tell us."

"My mother is coming out, sir."

"I suppose you are very fond of your mother, ar'n't you? And she is fond of you, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"She don't play Tom-fool's tricks, does she? She would n't cut away with a man, and leave you, would she?"

"No, sir."

"If she were to, should you like her all the same, eh?"

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"I cannot tell, sir. You will be pleased to close the conversation here, sir. My mother is a lady, and I don't allow any discussion whatever about her possible proceedings."

"I did n't mean to make you angry," said Bully Hillyar, the inspector, to quiet Dickenson, the cadet; "I am very sorry. I am afraid my manner must be unfortunate; for just now, on my honor, I was trying to make a friend of you, and I have only succeeded in making you angry."

Young Dickenson, not a wise being by any means, remembered this conversation all his life. He used to say afterwards that Bully Hillyar had had good points in him, and that he knew it. When George Hillyar was condemned, he used to say, "Well, well! this was bad, and that was bad, but he was a good fellow at bottom." The fact is, that George unbent, and was his better self before this young man. He had been slowly raising himself to a higher level, and was getting hopeful. When he felt those eyes fixed upon him, as he read his letter, — which eyes gave him a deadly chill, though he had not recognized them, — the vague anxiety which possessed him had caused him to be confidential with the first man he met.

So he rode slowly home to the barracks and sat down in his quarters to business, for he had taken the business off the hands of the Palmerston Inspector, and had so given him a holiday. The office was a very pleasant place, opening on the paddock, — at this time of year a sheet of golden green turf, shaded by low gum-trees, which let sunbeams through their boughs in all directions, to make a yellow pattern on the green ground. The paddock sloped down to the river, which gleamed a quarter of a mile off among the tree-stems.

It was a perfectly peaceful day in the very early spring. The hum of the distant town was scarcely perceptible, and there was hardly a sound in the barracks. Sometimes a few parrots would come whistling through the trees; sometimes a horse would neigh in the paddock; sometimes a lazily-moved oar would sound from the river; but quiet content and peace were over everything.

Even the two prisoners in the yard had ceased to talk, and sat silent in the sun. A trooper going into the stable, and two or three horses neighing, to him was an event. George Hillyar sat and thought in the stillness, and his thoughts were pleasant, and held him long.

At length he was aroused by voices in the yard, — one that of a trooper.

"I tell you he 's busy.

"But I really must see him," said the other voice. "I bring important information."

George listened intently.

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"I tell you," said the trooper, "he is busy Why can't you wait till he comes out?"

"If you don't do my message, mate, you 'll repent it."

"You 're a queer card to venture within a mile of a police-station at all; leave alone being cheeky when you are in the lion's jaws."

"Never you mind about that," said the other. "You mind your business half as well as I mind mine, and you 'll be a man before your mother now. What a pretty old lady she must be, if she 's like you. More mustache though, ain't she? How 's pussy? I was sorry for the old gal getting nabbed, but—"

As it was perfectly evident that there would, in one instant more, be a furious combat of two, and that George would have to give one of his best troopers a week's arrest, [redacted]pared out to know what the noise was about.

"A Sydney sider, sir, very saucy, insists upon seeing you."

"Show him in then. Perhaps he brings information."

The man laid George's revolver on the table, put the newspaper carelessly over it, saluted, and withdrew. Directly afterward the evil face of Samuel Burton was smiling in the doorway, and George Hillyar's heart grew cold within him.

CHAPTER XVI.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: ERNE AND EMMA.

My dear father's religious convictions were, and are, eminently orthodox. He had been born and bred under the shadow of a great Kentish family, and had in his earlier years,—until the age of manhood, indeed,—contemplated the act of going to church anywhere but at the family church in the park as something little less than treason. So when, moved by ambition, he broke through old routine so far as to come to London and establish himself, he grew fiercer than ever in his orthodoxy; and, having made such a desperate step as *that*, he felt that he must draw a line somewhere. He must have some holdfast to his old life; so his devotion to the Establishment was intense and jealous. The habit he had of attending church in all weathers on Sunday morning, and carefully spelling through the service, got to be so much a part of himself that, when our necessities compelled us to render ourselves to a place where you could n't go to church if you wished it, the craving after the old habit made my father

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most uneasy and anxious, as far on in the week as Tuesday afternoon; about which time the regret for the churchless Sunday just gone by would have worn itself out. But then the cloud of the equally churchless Sunday approaching would begin to lower down about Thursday afternoon, and grow darker as the day approached; so that for the first six months of our residence in our new home, our Saturday evenings were by no means what they used to be. And yet I can hardly say that my father was at this time a devout man. I think it was more a matter of custom.

Of political convictions, my father had none of any sort or kind whatever. He sternly refused to qualify himself, or to express any opinion on politics, even among his intimates at the Black Lion on Saturday evening. The reason he gave was, that he had a large family, and that custom was custom. Before you condemn him you must remember that he had never had a chance in his life of informing himself on public affairs, and that he showed a certain sort of dogged wisdom in refusing to be led by the nose by the idle and ignorant chatterboxes against whom he was thrown in the parlor of the public-house.

I wish he had shown half as much wisdom with regard to another matter, and I wish I and Joe had been a few years older before he went so far into it. Joe and I believed in him, and egged him on, as two simple, affectionate boys might be expected to do. The fact is, as I have hinted before, that my father had considerable mechanical genius, and was very fond of inventing; but then he was an utterly ignorant man, could scarcely read and write, and knew nothing of what attempts, and of what failures, had been made before his time.

As ill luck would have it, his first attempt in this line was a great success. He invented a centrifugal screw-plate, for cutting very long and large male screws almost instantaneously. He produced the handles of an ordinary screw-plate (carrying a nut two inches diameter), two feet each way, and weighted them heavily at the ends. This, being put on a lathe, was made to revolve rapidly, and by means of an endless screw, approached the bar of iron to be operated on when it was spinning at its extreme velocity. It caught the bar and ran up it as though it were wood, cutting a splendid screw. A large building firm, who needed these great screws for shores, and centres of arches, and so on, bought the patent from my father for seventy pounds.

This was really a pretty and useful invention. My mother went blazing down the street to church in a blue-silk gown and a red bonnet, and the gold and marqueterie in Lord Dacres's great monument paled before her glory. It was all very well, and would have been better had my father been content to leave well alone.

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But he was n't. I never knew a man worth much who was. The very next week he was hard at work on his new treadle-boat. We were saved from *that*. The evil day was staved off by Erne Hillyar.

Joe, among other benefits he was receiving as head boy at the parochial school, was getting a fair knowledge of mechanical drawing; so he had undertaken to make the drawings for this new invention. I had undertaken to sit next him and watch, keeping Fred quiet; my father sat on the other side; Frank lay on his back before the fire, singing softly; and the rest were grouped round Harry. Emma went silently hither and thither about housework, only coming now and then to look over Joe's shoulder; while my mother sat still beside the fire, with her arms folded, buried in thought. She had been uneasy in her mind all the evening; the green-grocer had told her that potatoes would be dear that autumn, and that "Now is your time, Mrs. Burton, and I can't say no fairer than that." She had argued the matter, in a rambling, desultory way, with any one who would let her, the whole evening, and was now arguing it with herself. But all of a sudden she cried out, "Lord a mercy!" and rose up.

It was not any new phase in the potato-question which caused her exclamation; it was Erne Hillyar. "I knocked, Mrs. Burton," he said, "and you did not hear me. May I come in?"

We all rose up to welcome him, but he said he would go away again if we did not sit exactly as we were; so we resumed our positions, and he came and sat down beside me, and leant over me, apparently to look at Joe's drawing.

"I say, Jim," he whispered, "I have run away again."

I whispered, "Would n't his pa be terrible anxious?"

"Not this time he won't. He will get into a wax this time. I don't want him to know where I come. If I go to the Parker's, they will tell him I don't spend all the time with them. I shall leave it a mystery."

I was so glad to see him, that I was determined to make him say something which I liked to hear. I said, "Why do you come here, sir?"

"To see you, gaby," he said; and I laughed. "And to see Emma also: so don't be conceited. What are you doing?"

My father and Joe explained the matter to him, and his countenance grew grave, but he said nothing. Very soon afterwards, Emma and he and I had managed to get into a corner together by the fire, and were talking together confidentially.

Erne told Emma of his having run away, and she was very angry with him. She said that, if he came so again, she would not speak one word to him. Erne pleaded with her, and defended himself. He said I was the only friend he had ever made, and

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that it was hard if he was never to see me. She said that was true, but that he should not do it in an underhand way. He said he must do it so, or not do it at all. She said that her brother was not one that need be run away to, or sought in holes and corners. He said that she knew nothing of the world and its prejudices, and that he should take his own way. She said it was time for Fred to go to bed, and she must wish him good-night; so they quarrelled, until Fred's artificial shell — pinafore, frock, and all the rest of it — was unbuttoned and unhooked, and nothing remained but to slip him out of it all, and stand him down, with nothing on but his shoes and stockings, to warm his stomach by the fire. When this was done, Erne came round and hoped she was n't angry with him. He said he would always try to do as she told him, but that he must and would come and see us. And she smiled at him again, and said she was sure that we three would always love one another, as long as we lived; and then, having put on Fred's night-gown, she carried him up to bed, singing as she went.

When Erne had done looking after her, he turned to me, and said: —

"Jim, she is right. I must not come sneaking here. I must have it out with the governor. I have told old Compton about it, and sworn him to secrecy. Now for some good news. Do you remember what you told me about the Thames?"

"Do you mean how it was getting to stink?"

"No, you great Hammersmith. I mean about sailing up it in a boat, as Joe and you and your cousin did; and all the tulip-trees and churches and tea-gardens." I dimly perceived that Erne wished me to take the æsthetical and picturesque view of the river, rather than the sanitary and practical. By way of showing him I understood him, I threw in: —

"Ah! and the skittle-alleys and flag-staffs."

"Exactly," he said. "It's a remarkable fact, that in my argument with my father I dwelt on that very point, — that identical point, I assure you. There's your skittles again, I said; there's a manly game for you. He did n't see it in that light at first, I allow; because he told me not to be an ass. But I have very little doubt I made an impression on him. At all events, I have gained the main point: you will allow that I triumphed."

I said "Yes"; I am sure I do n't know why. I liked to have him there talking to me, and would have said "Yes" to anything. We two might have rambled on for a long while, if Joe, who had come up, and was standing beside me, had not said, —

"How, sir, may I ask?"

"Why, by getting him to take a house at Kew. I am to go to school at Dr. Mayby's, and we are going to keep boats, and

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punts, and things. And I am going to see whether that pleasant cousin of yours, of whom you have told me, can be induced to come up and be our waterman, and teach me to row. Where is your cousin, by the by?"

He was out to-night, we said. He might be in any moment. Erne said, "No matter. Now, Mr. Burton, I want to speak to you, and to Joe."

My father was all attention. Erne took the drawings of the treadle-boat from my father, and told him that the thing had been tried fifty times, and had failed utterly as compared with the oar; that, with direct action, you could not gain sufficient velocity of revolution; and that, if you resorted to multiplying gear, the loss of power sustained by friction was so enormous as to destroy the whole utility of the invention. He proved his case clearly. Joe acquiesced, and so did my father. The scheme was abandoned there and then; and I was left wondering at the strange mixture of sound common sense, knowledge of the subject, and simplicity of language, which Erne had shown. I soon began to see that he had great talents and very great reading, but that, from his hermit-like life, his knowledge of his fellow-creatures was lower than Harry's.

He had got a bed, it appeared, at the Cadogan Hotel in Sloane Street, and I walked home with him. I was surprised, I remember, to find him, the young gentleman who had just put us so clearly right on what was an important question to us, and of which we were in the deepest ignorance, asking the most simple questions about the things in the shop-windows and the people in the streets, — what the things (such common things as bladders of lard and barrels of size) were used for, and what they cost? The costermongers were a great source of attraction to him, for the King's Road that night was nearly as full of them as the New Cut. "See here, Jim," he said, "here is a man with a barrow full of the common murex; do they eat them?" I replied that we ate them with vinegar, and called them whelks. Periwinkles he knew, and recognized as old friends, but tripe was a sealed book to him. I felt such an ox-like content and complacency in hearing his voice and having him near me, that we might have gone on examining this world, so wonderfully new to him, until it was too late to get into his hotel; but he luckily thought of it in time. I, remembering the remarks of a ribald station-master on a former occasion, did not go within reach of the hotel-lights. We parted affectionately, and so ended his second visit.

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CHAPTER XVII.

ERNE AND REUBEN.

THE next morning my father and I were informed that Mr. Compton would be glad to speak to us; and, on going indoors, there he was, as comforable and as neat as ever.

"Well, Burton," he said, cheerily, "how does the world use you? As you deserve, apparently, for you have n't grown older this fifteen years."

My father laughed, and said, "Better, he was afeared. His deservings were n't much. And how was Mr. Compton?"

"Well, thankee. Anything in my way? Any breach of patent, eh? Remember me when your fortune 's made. What a hulking great fellow Jim is getting! What do you give him to eat, hey, to make him grow so?"

My father was delighted to give any information to his old friend. He began to say that sometimes I had one thing and sometimes another, — may be, one day beef and another mutton. "Jints, you understand," said my father; "none of your kag-mag and skewer bits — "

"And a pretty good lot of both, I'll be bound. Was Erne here last night, Jim?"

You might have knocked me down with a feather. I had not the wildest notion that Mr. Compton, a very old acquaintance of my father, knew anything about the Hillyars. I said "Yes."

"I am very glad to hear it," he said. "There's a devil of a row about him at home. I hope he has gone back."

I said that he was gone back.

My father said, "Look here, Mr. Compton. I cannot say how glad I am you came to-day, of all men. I and my wife are in great trouble about Master Erne and his visits, and we don't rightly know what to do."

"I am in trouble also about the boy," said Mr. Compton; "but I *do* know what to do."

"So sure am I of that, sir," said my father, "that I was going to look you up, and ask your advice."

"And I came down to consult with you; and so here we are. How much does Jim know about all this?"

"A good deal," said my father; "and, if you please, I should wish him to know everything."

"Very well, then," continued Mr. Compton, "I will speak be-

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fore him as if he was not here. You know this young gentleman has not been brought up in an ordinary way, — that he knows nothing of the world; consequently I was terribly frightened as to where he might have run away to. When he told me where he had been, I was easy in my mind, but determined to come and speak to you, whom I have known from a child. What I ask of you is, Encourage him here, Burton and Jim, but don't let any one else get hold of him. He can get nothing but good in your house, I know. By what strange fatality he selected *your* family to visit, I cannot conceive. It was a merciful accident."

I told him about the yellow water-lilies.

"Hah," he said, "that removes the wonder of it. Now about his father."

"I should think," said my father, "that Sir George would hardly let him come here, after hearing our name?"

"He does not know that you are any connexion with our old friend Samuel. I don't see why we should tell him, — I don't indeed. It is much better to let bygones be bygones."

"Do you know that *his* son lives with us now?"

"Yes. You mean Reuben. How is he going on?"

"Capital, — as steady and as respectable as possible."

"Well, then," said Mr. Compton, "for *his* sake we should not be too communicative. Sir George knows nothing of you. He only knows your name from my father's having unfortunately recommended Samuel to him. I think, if you will take my advice, we will keep our counsel. Good-bye, old friend."

Mr. Compton and my father were playfellows. The two families came from the same village in Kent, and Mr. Compton had, unfortunately, recommended Samuel Burton to Sir George Hillyar.

Three days afterwards Erne came in, radiant. "It was all right," he said; "he was to come whenever he could get away."

"We had an awful row though," he continued; "I got old Compton to come home with me. 'Where have you been, sir?' my father said in an awful voice, and I said I had been seeing my friends, the Burtons, who were blacksmiths, — at least all of them except the women and children, — in Church Place, Chelsea. He stormed out that, if I must go and herd with blackguards, I might choose some of a less unlucky name, and frequent a less unlucky house. I said I did n't name them, and that therefore *that* part of the argument was disposed of; and that, as for being blackguards, they were far superior *in every point* to any family I had ever seen; and that their rank in life was as high as that of my mother, and therefore high enough for me. He stood aghast at my audacity, and old Compton came to my as-

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sistance. He told me afterwards that I had showed magnificent powers of debate, but that I must be careful not to get a habit of hard-hitting, — Lord knows what he meant. He told my father that these Burtons were really everything that was desirable, and went on no end about you. Then I told him that I had his own sanction for my proceedings, for that he himself had given me leave to make your acquaintance. He did not know that it was *you* I had been to see, and was mollified somewhat. I was ordered to leave the room. When I came back again, I just got the tail of the storm, which was followed by sunshine. To tell you the truth, he came to much easier than I liked. But here we are, at all events."

We sat and talked together for a short time; and, while we were talking, Reuben came in. Erne was sitting with his back towards the door; Reuben advanced towards the fire from behind him, and, seeing a young gentleman present, took off his cap and smoothed his hair. How well I can remember those two faces together. The contrast between them impressed me in a vague sort of way even then; I could not have told you why at that time, though I might now. Men who only get educated somewhat late in life, like myself, receive impressions and recognize facts, for which they find no reason till long after: so those two faces, so close together, puzzled me even then for an instant, for there was a certain similarity of expression, though probably none in feature. There was a look of reckless audacity in both faces, — highly refined in that of Erne, and degenerating into mere devil-may-care, cockney impudence in that of Reuben. Joe, who was with me, remarked that night in bed, that either of them, if tied up too tight, would break bounds and become lawless. That was true enough, but I saw more than that. Among other things, I saw that there was far more determination in Erne's beautiful set mouth than in the ever-shifting lips of my Cousin Reuben, I also saw another something, to which, at that time, I could give no name.

Reuben came and leant against the fireplace, and I introduced him. Erne immediately shook hands and made friends. We had not settled to talk when Emma came in, and, after a kind greeting between Erne and her, sat down and began her work.

"You 're a waterman, are you not, Reuben?" said Erne.

Reuben was proud to say he was a full waterman.

"It is too good luck to contemplate," said Erne; "but we want a waterman, in our new place at Kew, to look after boats and attend me when I bathe, to see I don't drown myself. I suppose you would n't — eh?"

Reuben seemed to think he would rather like it. He looked at Emma.

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"Just what I mean," said Erne. "What do you say, Emma?"

Emma looked steadily at Reuben, and said quietly:

"If it suits Reuben, sir, I can answer for him. Answer for him in every way. Tell me, Reuben. Can I answer for you?"

Reuben set his mouth almost as steadily as Erne's, and said she might answer for him.

"Then will you come?" said Erne. "That will be capital. Don't you think it will be glorious, Emma?"

"I think it will be very nice, sir. It will be another link between you and my brother."

"And between myself and you."

"That is true also," said Emma. "And I cannot tell you how glad I am of that, because I like you so very, very much. Next to Jim, and Joe, and Reuben, I think I like you better than any boy I know."

CHAPTER XVIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: REUBEN AND SIR GEORGE HILLYAR.

GOLDEN hours, which can never come back any more. Hours as peaceful and happy as the close of a summer Sabbath, among dark whispering elm-woods, or on quiet downs, aloft above the murmuring village. Was it on that evening only, or was it on many similar evenings, that we all sat together, in a twilight which seemed to last for hours, before the fire, talking quietly together? Why, when at this distance of time I recall those gatherings before the fire, in the quaint draughty old room, do I always think of such things as these? — of dim, vast cathedrals, when the service is over, and the last echoes of the organ seem still rambling in the roof, trying to break away after their fellows towards heaven, — of quiet bays between lofty chalk headlands, where one lies and basks the long summer day before the gently murmuring surf, — of very quiet old churches, where the monuments of the dead are crowded thick together, and the afternoon sun slopes in on the kneeling and lying effigies of men who have done their part in the great English work, and are waiting, without care, without anxiety, for their wages? Why does my rambling fancy, on these occasions, ever come back again to the long series of peaceful and quiet images, — to crimson sunsets during a calm in mid ocean, — to high green capes, seen from the sea, the sides of whose long-drawn valleys are ribbed with gray rocks,

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— to curtains of purple dolomite, seen from miles away across the yellow plain, cut in the centre by a silver waterfall, — to great icebergs floating on the calm blue sea, — to everything, in short, which I have seen in my life which speaks of peace? And why, again, do I always come at last to the wild dim blue promontory, whose wrinkled downs are half obscured by clouds of wind-driven spray?

How many of these evenings were there? There must have been a great many, because I remember that Reuben came home for the winter one dead drear November night, and Erne accompanied him and stayed for an hour. I cannot say how long they lasted. A year or two, first and last.

What arose out of them that is noticeable is soon told. In the first place, this period constituted a new era in Joe's life. Erne's books and Erne's knowledge and assistance were at his service, and he soon, as Erne told me, began to bid fair to be a distinguished scholar. "He not only had perseverance and memory, but genius also," said Erne. "He sees the meaning of a thing quicker than I do. Joe is far cleverer than I."

At first I had been a little anxious about one thing, though I have never named my anxiety to any one. I was afraid lest Reuben should become jealous of Erne, and stay away from us. It was not so. Reuben grew devoted to Erne, and seemed pleased with his admiration of Emma. I began to see that Emma's influence over Reuben, great as it was, arose more from a sincere respect and esteem on his part than anything else. I was therefore glad to find that nothing was likely to interfere with it. As for Erne, he had fallen most deeply in love with her, and I had seen it from the beginning.

I, for my part, in my simplicity, could see no harm in that. In fact, it seemed to me an absolutely perfect arrangement that these two should pass their lives in a fool's paradise together. As for my father and mother, they looked on us all as a parcel of children, and nothing more; and, besides, they both had the blindest confidence in Emma, child as she was. At all events, I will go bail that no two people ever lived less capable of any design on Erne's rank or property. I insult them by mentioning such a subject.

Whether it was that I had represented Sir George Hillyar to Reuben as a very terrible person, or whether it was that Reuben's London assurance would not stand the test of the chilling atmosphere of the upper classes, I cannot say; but Reuben was cowed. When the time came for him to fulfil his engagement to go to Kew and take care of Sir George Hillyar's boats, he grew anxious and fidgetty, and showed a strong tendency to back out of the whole business.

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"I say, Emma, old woman," he said, the night before I was to go with him and introduce him, "I wish I was well out of this here."

"Well out of what, Reuben dear?" said Emma. — "And no body but the child and the two angels knew as the crossing sweeper boy was gone to heaven; but, when they got up there, he was awaiting for 'em, just as the angel in blue had told the angel in pink silk and spangles he would be." (This last was only the tail of some silly story which she had been telling the little ones; it has nothing to do with the plot).

"Why, well out of going up to Kew, to look after these boats. The old co — gentleman, I should say, is a horrid old painted Mussulman. When he do go on the war-train, which is twenty-four hours a day, — no allowance for meals, — he is everlastingly a-digging up of his tommyawk. All the servants is prematurely gray; and, if the flowers don't blow on the very day set down in the gardening column of *Bell's Life*, he 's down on the gardeners, till earthquakes and equinoctials is a fool to him."

"Ain't you talking nonsense, Reuben dear?" said Emma.

"May be," said Reuben, quietly. "But, by all accounts, he is the most exasperating bart as ever was since barts was, which was four years afore the first whycount married the heiress of the great cod-liver-oil manufacturer at Battersea. It flew to his lower extremities," continued Reuben, looking in a comically defiant manner at Emma, and carefully putting the fire together; "and he drank hisself to death with it. He died like a bus-horse, in consequence of the grease getting into his heels. Now!"

"Have you quite done, Reuben?" asked Emma.

Reuben said he had finished for the present.

"Then," said Emma, "let me tell you that you are very fool ish in prejudicing yourself against this gentleman from what you have heard at the waterside, since he came to Kew. However, I am not altogether sorry, for you will find him quite different, — quite different, I assure you."

It was bedtime, and we all moved up stairs together in a compact body, on account of Frank. That tiresome young monkey, Harry, in an idle hour — when, as Dr. Watts tells us, Satan is ready to find employment — had told Frank that the Guy Fawkeses lived under the stairs, and had produced the most tiresome complications. The first we heard of it was one day when Frank was helping Fred down stairs. Fred was coming carefully down one step at a time, sucking his thumb the while, and holding on by Frank, when Frank suddenly gave a sharp squeal, and down the two came, fifteen stairs, on to the mat at the bottom. To show the extraordinary tricks which our imaginations play with us at times, — to show, indeed, that Mind does

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sometimes triumph over Matter, — I may mention that Frank (the soul of truth and honesty) declared positively that he had seen an arm clothed in blue cloth, with brass buttons at the wrist, thrust itself through the banisters, and try to catch hold of his leg. On observing looks of incredulity, he added that the Hand of the Arm was full of brimstone matches, and that he saw the straw coming out at its elbows. After this, a strong escort was necessary every night, when he went to bed. He generally preferred going up pick-a-back on Reuben's broad shoulders, feeling probably safer about the legs.

How well I remember a little trait of character that night. Fred conceived it more manly to walk up to bed without the assistance even of Emma. When we were half-way up the great staircase, Reuben, carrying Frank, raised an alarm of Guy Fawkeses. We all rushed, screaming and laughing, up the stairs, and when we gained the landing, and looked back, we saw that we had left Fred behind, in the midst of all the dreadful peril which we had escaped. But the child toiled steadily and slowly on after us, with a broad smile on his face, refusing to hurry himself for all the Guy Fawkeses in the world. When he got his Victoria Cross at Delhi for staying behind, that he might bring poor Lieutenant Tacks back on his shoulders, to die among English faces, I thought of this night on the stairs at Chelsea. He hurried no faster out of that terrible musketry fire in the narrow street than he did from the Guy Fawkeses on the stairs. Among all Peel's heroes, there was no greater hero than our big-headed Fred. The post-captain who has got Frederick Burton for his boatswain is an envied and lucky man to this day.

Reuben, who had to toil up stairs to his lonely haunted room at the top of the house, asked me to come with him. Of course I went, though, great lubberly lad as I was, I remember having an indistinct dread of coming down again by myself.

There was a dull fire burning, and the great attic looked horribly ghostly; and, as I sat before the fire, strange unearthly draughts seemed to come from the deserted and still more ghostly room beyond, which struck, now on this shoulder and now on that, with a chill, as if something was laying its hand on me. Reuben had lit a candle, but that did not make matters better, but a great deal worse; for, when I looked at his face by the light of it, I saw that he looked wild and wan, and was ashy pale.

He took a letter from the pocket of his pea-jacket, and burnt it. Before it was quite consumed, he turned to me, and said: —

"Jim, Jim, dear old chap, you won't desert me, will you, when it comes, and I can't see or speak to Emma or the kids any more? You will go between us sometimes, and tell her and them that I

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am only stupid old Reuben, as loves 'em well, by G—; and that I ain't changed in spite of all?"

I was infinitely distressed. The fact is, that I loved my cousin Reuben, — in a selfish way, of course. I had a certain quantity of rough, latent humor, but no power of expression. Reuben, on a mere hint from me of some gross incongruity, would spin out yard after yard of verbose, fantastic nonsense to the text which I had given him. He was necessary to me, and I was fond of him in consequence.

"Reuben, old boy," I said, "I'll go to death with you. I'll never, never desert you, I tell you. If you have been led away, Reuben, why, you may be led back again." I took his hand, and *felt* that I was as pale as he. "Is it — is it — anything that will take you for long, Rube? Shall you go abroad, Rube?" And here, like a young fool, I burst out crying.

"Lord bless his faithful heart!" said Reuben, in his old manner, "*I* have n't been doing of nothink. But, Jim, what was it you said just now?"

I said, "What did he mean? 'that I could follow him to death?'"

He said, "Yes; that is what I meant. And, Jim, old chap, it *runs* to that. Not for me, but for others. In my belief, Jim, it runs to that. Joe could tell us, but we musn't ask Joe. Joe 's a chap as is rising fast, and musn't be pulled down by other folk's troubles. Lawyers could tell us, — but, Lord love you, we musn't ask no lawyers. We 'd best know nothing about it than ask they. And *you* musn't *know* nothing either; only don't desert me, old Jim."

I said again that I would not. And, if ever I kept my word, I kept that promise.

"I know you won't," he said, with that strange mixture of shrewdness, rough honor, and recklessness which one finds among Londoners; "but then, Jim, if you are true to me, you will have, may be, to know and not to know at one and the same time, to go with a guilty breast among the little ones, and before Emma. Better leave me, Jim; better leave me while you can."

I declared I would not; but that I would stick by him and give him a good word when he wanted it. And then, at his solicitation, I stayed with him all night. Once he woke, and cried out that the barge had got too far down the river, and was drifting out to sea. Then that the corpses of all the people who had committed suicide on the bridges were rising up and looking at us. I slept but little after this, and was glad when morning dawned.

But the next morning Reuben was as bright, as brisk, and as nonsensical as ever. He defied Emma. She ventured to hope that he would be steady, and not attend to everything he heard

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about people without inquiry. He said he was obliged to her, and would n't; that he had left three or four pair of old boots up stairs, and, if she 'd be good enough to send 'em to the beadle and get 'em darned, he 'd thank her. The passion and earnestness of last night was all gone apparently. Nothing was to be got from him, even by Emma, but chaff and nonsense. The true London soul revolted from, and was ashamed of, the passion of last night. Even with me he seemed half ashamed and half captious.

We were not very long in getting to Kew. Early as we were, the servants had to inform us that Sir George and Mr. Erne had gone out riding. We waited in the servants' hall, in and out of which gray-headed servants came now and then to look, it would seem, at the strange sight of two round young faces like ours. About nine o'clock, the butler came and asked us to come to prayers, and we went up into a great room, where breakfast was laid, and made the end of a long row of servants, sitting with our backs against a great sideboard, while a gray-headed old gentleman read a very long prayer. The moment we were alone together, Reuben, who was in a singularly nervous and insolent mood, objected to this prayer in language of his own, which I shall not repeat. He objected that three-quarters of it was consumed in conveying information to the Deity, concerning our own unworthiness and his manifold greatness and goodness; and that altogether it was as utterly unlike the Lord's Prayer or any of the Church prayers as need be.

I was very anxious about him. I dreaded the meeting between him and the terrible old baronet. I was glad when things came to a crisis. We saw Sir George come riding across the park on a beautiful swift-stepping gray cob, accompanied by Erne on a great, nearly thorough-bred chestnut. They were talking merrily together and laughing. They were certainly a splendid couple, though Erne would have looked to better advantage on a smaller horse. They rode into the stable-yard, where we were instructed to wait for them, and dismounted.

"That," said Sir George Hillyar, advancing and pointing sternly at me with his riding-whip, "is the boy Burton. I have seen him before."

This previous conviction was too damning to be resisted. I pleaded guilty.

"And that?" said he, turning almost fiercely upon Reuben.

Erne stood amused, leaving us to fight our own battle. I said it was Rube.

"Who?" said Sir George.

"Reuben, my cousin," I said, "that was come to take care of his honor's boats."

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Sir George looked at Reuben for full a minute without speaking, and then he said, "Come here, you young monkey."

As Reuben approached, utterly puzzled by this style of reception, I noticed a look of curiosity on Sir George's face. When Reuben stood before him, quick as light Sir George turned and looked at Erne for one second, and then looked at Reuben again. Steadily gazing at him, he pointed the handle of his riding-whip towards him, and said, "Look here, sirrah, do you hear? You are to have fifteen shillings a week, and are to put three half-crowns in the savings'-bank. You are to get up at seven, to say your prayers, to clean the boats, and offer to help the gardener. If he is fool enough to accept your offer, you may tell him that you were n't hired to work in the garden. If Mr. Erne bathes, you are to row round and round him in a boat, and try to prevent his drowning himself. If he does, you are to send a servant to me, informing me of the fact, and go for the drags. If such a casualty should occur, you are to consider your engagement as terminated that day week. I object to skittles, to potting at public-houses, and to running along the towing-path like a lunatic, bellowing at the idiots who row boat-races. Any conversation with my son Erne on the subjects of pigeon-shooting, pedestrianism, bagatelle, all-fours, toy-terriers, or Non-conformist doctrines, will lead to your immediate dismissal. Do you understand!"

I did not; but Erne and Reuben did. They understood that the old man had taken a fancy to Reuben, and was making fun. They both told me this, and of course I saw they were right at once. Still, I was puzzled at one thing more. Why, after he had turned away, did the old gentleman come back after a few steps, and lay his hands on Reuben's shoulders, looking eagerly into his face? Could he see any likeness to his father, — to the man who had used him so cruelly, — to Samuel Burton? I could not think so. It must have been merely an old man's fancy for Reuben's handsome, merry countenance; for Sir George pushed him away with a smile, and bade him go about his business.

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CHAPTER XIX.

SAMUEL BURTON GOES INTO THE LICENSED VICTUALLING LINE.

As Samuel Burton came, hat in hand, with bent and cringing body, into George Hillyar's office in the barracks at Palmerston, George Hillyar turned his chair round towards him; and when the door was shut behind him, and the trooper's footfall had died away, he still sat looking firmly at him, without speaking.

He could not *turn* pale, for he was always pale; he could not look anxious, for he had always a worn look about his eyes. He merely sat and stared steadily at the bowing convict, with a look of inquiry in his face. The convict spoke first, —

"I have not seen your honor for many years."

"Not for many years," said George Hillyar.

"I have been in trouble since I had the pleasure of seeing your honor."

"So I understand, Samuel," said George.

"Thank you, Master George, for that kind expression. You have not forgot me. Thank you, sir."

"You and I are not likely to forget one another, are we?" said George Hillyar.

"I have noticed," said the convict, "in a somewhat chequered career, that the memories of gentlefolks were weak, and wanted jogging at times — "

"Look here," said George Hillyar, rising coolly, and walking towards the man. "Let me see you try to jog mine. Let me see you only once attempt it. Do you hear? Just try. Are you going to threaten, hey? D—n you; just try it, will you. Do you hear?"

He not only heard, but he minded. As George Hillyar advanced towards him, he retreated, until at last, being able to go no farther, he stood upright against the weather-boards of the wall, and George stood before him, pointing at him with his finger.

"Bah!" said George Hillyar, after a few seconds, going back to his chair. "Why do you irritate me? You should know my temper by this time, Samuel. I don't want to quarrel with you?"

"I am sure you don't, sir," said Burton.

"Why are you sure I don't?" snarled George, looking at him

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angrily. "Why, eh? Why are you sure that I don't want to quarrel with you, and be rid of you forever? Hey?"

"Oh dear! I am sure I don't know, sir. I meant no offence. I am very humble and submissive. I do assure you, Mr. George, that I am very submissive. I did n't expect such a reception, sir. I had no reason to. I have been faithful and true to you, Mr. George, through everything. I am a poor, miserable, used-up-man, all alone in the world. Were I ever such a traitor, Mr. George, I am too old and broken by trouble, though not by years, to be dangerous."

The cat-like vitality which showed itself in every movement of his body told another story though. George Hillyar saw it, and he saw also, now that he had had an instant for reflection, that he had made a sad mistake in his way of receiving the man. The consciousness of his terrible blunder came upon him with a sudden jar. He had shown the man, in his sudden irritation, that he distrusted and hated him; and he had sense to see that no cajolery or flattery would ever undo the mischief which he had made by his loss of temper, and by a few wild words. He saw by the man's last speech that the miserable convict had some sparks of love left for his old master, until he had wilfully trampled them out in his folly. He saw, now it was too late, that he might have negotiated successfully on the basis of their old association; and at the same time that he, by a few cruel words, had rendered it impossible. The poor wretch had come to him in humility, believing him to be the last person left in the world who cared for him. George had rudely broken his fancy by his causeless suspicion, and put the matter on a totally different footing.

He clumsily tried to patch the matter up. He said, "There, I beg your pardon; I was irritated and nervous. You must forget all I have said."

"And a good deal else with it, sir, I am afraid," said Burton. "Never mind, sir; I'll forget it all. I am worse than I was."

"Now don't *you* get irritated," said George, "because that would be very ridiculous, and do no good to any one. If you can't stand my temper after so many years, we shall never get on."

"I am not irritated, sir. I came to you to ask for your assistance, and you seem to have taken it into your head that I was going to threaten you with old matters. I had no intention of anything of the sort. I merely thought you might have a warm place left in your heart for one who served you so well, for evil or for good. I am very humble, sir. If I were ungrateful enough to do so, I should never dare to try a game of bowls with an Inspector of Police in this country, sir. I only humbly ask for your assistance."

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"Samuel," said George Hillyar, "we have been mistaking one another."

"I think we have, sir," said Burton.

And, although George looked up quickly enough, the sly scornful expression was smoothed out of Burton's face, and he saw nothing of it.

"I am sure we have," continued George. "Just be reasonable. Suppose I *did* think at first that you were going to try to extort money from me: why, then, it all comes to this, that I was mistaken. Surely that is enough of an apology."

"I need no apologies, Mr. George. As I told you before, I am only submissive. I am your servant still, sir. Only your servant."

"What am I to do for you, Samuel? Anything?"

"I came here to-day, sir, to ask a favor. The fact is, sir, I came to ask for some money. After what has passed, I suppose I may go away again. Nevertheless, sir, you need n't be afraid of refusing. I have n't — have n't — Well, never mind; all these fears to turn Turk at last, with such odds against me, too."

"How much do you want, Samuel?" said George Hillyar.

"I'll tell you, sir, all about it. A man who owes me money, an old mate of mine, is doing well in a public house at Perth, in West Australia. He has written to me to say that, if I will come, I shall come into partnership for the debt. It is a great opening for me; I shall never have to trouble you again. Thirty pounds would make a gentleman of me just now. I say nothing of your getting rid of me for good —"

"You need say nothing more, Samuel," said George. "I will give you the money. What ship shall you go by?"

"The *Windsor* sails next week, sir, and calls at King George's Sound. That would do for me."

"Very well, then," said George; "here is the money; go by her. It is better that we separate. You see that these confidences, these long *tête-à-têtes*, between us are not reputable. I mean no unkindness; you must see it."

"You are right, sir, It shall not happen again. I humbly thank you, sir. And I bid you good day."

He was moving towards the door, when George Hillyar turned his chair away from him, as though he was going to look out of window into the paddock, and said, "Stop a moment, Samuel."

The convict faced round at once. He could see nothing but the back of George's head, and George seemed to be sitting in profound repose, staring at the green trees, and the parrots which were whistling and chattering among the boughs. Burton's snake-like eyes gleamed with curiosity.

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"You watched me to-day in the Post-office," said George.

"Yes, sir; but I did not think you saw me."

"No more I did. I felt you," answered George. "By the by, you got fourteen years for the Stanlake business, did you not?"

"Yes, sir; fourteen weary years," said Burton, looking inquiringly at the back of George's head, and madly wishing that he could see his face.

"Only just out now, is it?" said George.

"I was free in eight, sir. Then I got two. I should have got life over this last bank robbery, but that I turned Queen's evidence."

"I hope you will mend your ways," said George, repeating, unconsciously, Mr. Oxton's words to the same man on a former occasion. "By George, Samuel, why don't you?"

"I am going to, sir," replied Burton, hurriedly; and still he stood, without moving a muscle, staring at the back of George Hillyar's head so eagerly that he never drew his breath, and his red-brown face lost its redness in his anxiety.

At last George spoke, and he smiled as though he knew what was coming.

"Samuel," he said, "I believe your wife died; did she not?"

"Yes, sir, she died."

"How did she die?"

"Consumption."

"I don't mean that. I mean, what was her frame of mind, — there, go away, for God's sake; there will be some infernal scandal or another if we stay much longer. Here! Guard. See this man out. I tell you I won't act on such information. Go along with you. Unless you can put your information together better than that, you may tell your story to the marines on board the *Pelorus*. Go away."

Samuel Burton put on the expression of face of a man who was humbly assured that his conclusions were right, and only required time to prove it. It was an easy matter for those facile, practised features to twist themselves into any expression in one instant. There is no actor like an old convict. He sneaked across the yard with this expression on his face, until he came to the gate, at which stood five troopers, watching him as he passed.

He could n't stand it. The devil was too strong in him. Here were five of these accursed bloodhounds, all in blue and silver lace, standing looking at him contemptuously, and twisting their mustaches: five policemen, — men who had never had the pluck to do a dishonest action in their lives, — standing and sneering at *him*, who knew the whole great art and business of crime at his fingers' ends. It was intolerable. He drew himself up, and be-

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gan on them. It was as if a little Yankee *Monitor*, steaming past our fleet of great iron-clad frigates, should suddenly, spitefully, and hopelessly open fire on it.

I can see the group now. The five big, burly, honest, young men, standing silently and contemptuously looking at Samuel in the bright sunlight; and the convict sidling past them, rubbing his hands, with a look of burlesqued politeness in his face.

"And good day, my noble captains," he began, with a sidelong bow, his head on one side like a cockatoo's, and his eye turned up looking nowhere. "Good day, my veterans, my champions. My bonny, pad-clinking,* out-after-eight-o'clock-parade, George Street bucks, good day. Does any one of you know aught of one trooper Evans, lately quartered at Cape Wilberforce?"

"Ah!" said the youngest of the men, a mere lad; "why, he 's my brother."

"No," said Samuel, who was perfectly aware of the fact. "Well, well! It seems as if I was always to be the bearer of bad news somehow."

"What d' ye mean, old man?" said the young fellow, turning pale. "There 's nothing the matter with Bill, is there?"

Samuel merely shook his head slowly. His enjoyment of that look of concern, which he had brought upon the five honest faces, was more intense than anything *we* can understand.

"Come, cheer up, Tom," said the oldest of the troopers to the youngest. "Speak out, old man; don't you see our comrade 's in distress?"

"I should like to have broke it to him by degrees," said Samuel; "but it must all come out. Bear up, I tell you. Take it like a man. Your brother 's been took; and bail 's refused."

"That 's a lie," said Tom, who was no other than George Hillyar's orderly. "If you tell me that Bill has been up to anything, I tell you it 's a lie."

"He was caught," said Samuel, steadily, "boning of his lieutenant's pomatum to ile his mustachers. Two Blacks and a Chinee seen him a-doing on it, and when he was took his 'ands was greasy. Bail was refused in consequence of a previous conviction again him, for robbing a blind widder woman of a Bible and a old possum rug while she was attending her husband's funeral. The clerk of the Bench has got him a-digging in his potato-garden now at this present moment, waiting for the sessions. Good-bye, my beauties. Keep out of the sun, and don't spile your complexions. Good-bye."

* Alluding to the clinking of their spurs.

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CHAPTER XX.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: REUBEN ENTERTAINS MYSTERIOUS AND UNSATISFACTORY COMPANY.

I AM doubtful, to this very day, whether or no Sir George Hillyar knew or guessed that we were relations of Samuel Burton, the man who had robbed him. I think that he did not know; if he did, it was evident that he generously meant to ignore it. Mr. Compton, who had recommended Samuel, told us to say nothing about it; and we said nothing. Emma surprised Joe and me one night, when we were alone together, by firing up on the subject, and saying distinctly and decidedly that she thought we were all wrong in not telling him. I was rather inclined to agree with her; but what was to be done? It was not for us to decide.

The relations between the two families were becoming very intimate indeed. Sir George Hillyar had taken a most extraordinary fancy for Reuben, which he showed by bullying him in a petulant way the whole day long, and by continually giving him boots and clothes as peace-offerings. Reuben would take everything said to him with the most unfailing good humor, and would stand quietly and patiently, hat in hand, before Sir George, and rub his cheek, or scratch his head, or chew a piece of stick, while the "jobation" was going on. He took to Sir George Hillyar amazingly. He would follow him about like a dog, and try to anticipate his wishes in every way. He did not seem to be in the least afraid of him, but would even grin in the middle of one of Sir George's most furious tirades. They were a strange couple, so utterly different in character; Sir George so ferociously obstinate, and Reuben so singularly weak and yielding; and yet they had a singular attraction for one another.

"Erne," Sir George would roar out of window, "where the devil is that tiresome monkey of a waterman?"

"I have n't seen him to-day," Erne would reply. "He has been missing since last night. The servants think he has drowned himself, after the rowing you gave him last night. *I* think that he has merely run away. If you like, I will order the drags."

"Don't you be a jackanapes. Find him."

Rueben would be produced before the window.

"May I take the liberty of asking how you have been employing your time, sir? The boats are not cleaned."

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"Cleaned 'em by nine this morning, sir."

"You have not fetched home that punt-pole, sir, as you were expressly ordered."

"Fetched it home last night, sir."

"And why was it not fetched home before, sir?"

"The old cove as had the mending on it," Reuben would answer, going off at score in his old way, "has fell out with his missis, and she hid his shoes in the timber-yard, and went off to Hampton fair in a van, along with Mrs. Scuttle, the master-sweep's lady, and he had to lie in bed till she came back, which was n't soon, for she is fond of society and calculated to adorn it; and, when she come, she could n't remember where the shoes was put to, and so —"

"What do you mean, sir?" Sir George would interrupt, "by raking up all this wretched blackguardism before my son Erne?"

Reuben would say, that he had been asked, and supposed that he did right in answering; and by degrees the storm would blow over, and Reuben would in some way find himself the better for it. When Erne told me that he had seen his father sit on a bench and watch Reuben at his work for an hour together, I began to think that Sir George had a shrewd guess as to who Reuben was; and also to have a fancy that there might be two sides to Samuel Burton's story; and that it was dimly possible that Sir George might wish to atone for some wrong which he had done to our cousin. But I said nothing to any one, and you will see whether or no I was right by and by.

However, Reuben's success with Sir George was quite notorious in our little circle. My mother said that it was as clear as mud that Sir George intended to underswear his personalities in Reuben's favor. I might have wondered what she meant, but I had given up wondering what my mother meant, years ago, as a bad job.

I saw Reuben very often during his stay at Stanlake, and he was always the very Reuben of old times, — reckless, merry, saucy, and independent, — ready to do the first thing proposed, without any question or hesitation. The dark cloud which had come over him the night I went up and slept with him in the ghost-room had apparently passed away. Twice I alluded to it, but was only answered by a mad string of Cockney balderdash, like his answers to Sir George Hillyar, one of which I have given above as a specimen. The third time I alluded to the subject, he was beginning to laugh again, but I stopped him.

"Rube," I said, looking into his face, "I don't want *you* to talk about that night. I want you to remember what I said that night. I said, Rube, that, come what would, I would stick by you. Remember that."

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"I 'll remember, old Jim," he said, trying to laugh it off. But I saw that I had brought the cloud into his face again, and I bided my time.

When the boating season was over, the Hillyars went back into the great house at Stanlake, and Reuben came home and took up his quarters once more in the ghost's-room, at the top of the house; and then I saw that the cloud was on his face again, and that it grew darker day by day.

I noticed the expression of poor Reuben's face the more, perhaps, because there was something so *pitiable* in it, — a look of abject, expectant terror. I felt humiliated whenever I looked at Reuben. I wondered to myself whether, under any circumstances, *my* face could assume that expression. I hoped not. His weak, handsome face got an expression of eager, terrified listening, most painful to witness. Mr. Faulkner had lent Joe "Tom and Jerry," and among other pictures in it was one of an effeminate, middle-aged forger, just preparing for the gallows, by George Cruikshank; and, when I saw that most terrible picture, I was obliged to confess that Reuben might have sat for it.

A very few nights after his return, just when I had satisfied myself of all the above-mentioned facts about Reuben, it so happened that Fred, being started for a run in his night-shirt, the last thing before going to bed, had incontinently run into the back-kitchen, climbed on to the sink to see his brothers, Harry and Frank, pumping the kettle full for the next morning, slipped upon the soap, come down on one end, and wetted himself. My mother was in favor of airing a fresh night-gown, but Emma undertook to dry him in less time; so they all went to bed, leaving Fred standing patiently at Emma's knees, with his back towards the fire, in a cloud of ascending steam.

I had caught her eye for one instant, and I saw that it said: "Stay with me." So I came and sat down beside her.

"Jim, dear," she said eagerly, "you have noticed Reuben: I have seen you watching him."

"What is it, sweetheart?" I answered. "Can you make anything of it?"

"Nothing, Jim," she said. "I am fairly puzzled. Has he confided to you?"

I told her faithfully what had passed between us the night I stayed in his room.

"He has done nothing wrong; that is evident," she said. "I am glad of that. I love Reuben, Jim, dear. I would n't have anything happen to Reuben for anything in the world. Let us watch him and save him, Jim; let us watch him and save him."

I promised that I would do so, and I did. I had not long to watch. In three days from that conversation, the look of fright-

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ened expectation in Reuben's face was gone, and in its place there was one of surly defiance. I saw that what he had expected had come to pass. But what was *that*? I could not conceive. I could only remember my promise to him, to stick by him, and wait till he chose to tell me. For there was that in his eyes which told me that I *must* wait his time; that I must do anything but ask.

He left off coming in to see us of an evening, but would only look in to say "Good night," and then we would hear him toiling up the big stairs all alone. Two or three times Emma would waylay him and try to tempt him to talk, but he would turn away. Once she told me he laid his head down on the banisters and covered his face; she thought he was going to speak, but he raised it again almost directly, and went away hurriedly.

The house was very nearly empty just now. The lodgers, who had, so to speak, flocked to my father's standard at first, had found the house dull, and had one by one left us, to go back into the old houses, as buildings which were not so commodious, but not so intolerably melancholy. The house was not so bad in summer; but, when the November winds began to stalk about the empty rooms, like ghosts, and bang the shutters, in the dead of night, — or when the house was filled from top to bottom with the November fog, so that, when you stood in the middle of the great room at night with a candle, the walls were invisible, and you found yourself, as it were, out of sight of land, — then it became a severe trial to any one's nerves to live above stairs. They dropped off one by one; even the Agars and the Holmeses, our oldest friends. They plainly told us why; we could not blame them, and we told them so.

It used to appear to me so dreadfully desolate for Reuben, sleeping alone up there at the very top of the house, separated from everything human and lifelike by four melancholy stories of empty ghost-haunted rooms. I thought of it in bed, and it prevented my sleeping. I knew that some trouble was hanging over his head, and I thought that there was something infinitely sad and pathetic in the fact of that one weak, affectionate soul lying aloft there, so far away from all of us, brooding in solitude. Alone in the desolate darkness, with trouble, — nay, perhaps with guilt.

One night I lay awake so long thinking of this, that I felt that my judgment was getting slightly unhinged, — that, in short, I was wandering on the subject. I awoke Joe. He had never been taken into full confidence about Reuben and his troubles. Reuben was a little afraid of him, and had asked me not to speak to him on the subject, but I had long thought that we were foolish, in not having the advice of the soundest head in the house; so,

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finding my own judgment going, I awoke him and told him everything.

"I have been watching too," said Joe, "and I saw that he had asked you and Emma to say nothing to me. Mind you never let him know you have. I'll tell you what to do, old man. What time is it?"

It was half-past eleven, by my watch.

"Get up and put on some clothes; go up stairs and offer to sleep with him."

"So late," I said. "Won't he be angry?"

"Never mind that. He ought n't to be left alone brooding there. He'll — he'll — take to drink or something. Go up now, old man, and see if he will let you sleep with him."

It was the cold that made my teeth chatter. I feel quite sure that it was not the terror of facing those endless broad stairs in the middle of a November night, but chatter they did. I had made my determination, however; I was determined that I would go up to poor Reuben, and so I partly dressed myself. Joe partly dressed himself too, saying that he would wait for me.

Oh, that horrible journey aloft, past the long corridors, and the miserable bare empty rooms, up the vast empty staircases, out of which things looked at me, and walked away again with audible footsteps! Bah! it makes me shudder to think of it now.

But, at last, after innumerable terrors, I reached Reuben's room-door, and knocked. He was snoring very loud indeed, — a new trick of his. After I had knocked twice, he suddenly half-opened the door, and looked out before I had heard him approach it. It was dark, and we could not see one another. Reuben whispered, "Who's there?" and I answered,

"It's only me, Rube. I thought you were so lonely, and I came up to sleep with you."

He said, "That's like you. Don't come in, old fellow; the floor's damp: let me come down and sleep with you instead. Wait."

I waited while Reuben found his trousers, and all the while he kept snoring with a vigor and regularity highly creditable. At last, after a few moments indeed, I made the singularly shrewd guess that there was some one else sleeping in Reuben's room, — some one who lay on his back, and the passages of whose nose were very much contracted.

Reuben came down stairs with me in the dark. He said it was so kind of me to think of him. He confided to me that he had a "cove" up stairs, a great pigeon-fancier, to whom he, Reuben, owed money; but which pigeon-fancier was in hiding, in consequence of a mistake about some turbits, into which it would

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be tedious to go. I *thought* it was something of that kind, and was delighted to find that I was right. I took occasion to give Rube about three-halfpennyworth of good advice about low company, but he cut it short; for he rolled sleepily into our room, where a light was burning, and tumbled into my bed with one of his old laughs, and seemed to go to sleep instantly.

I was glad of this, for I was in mortal fear lest he should notice one fact: Joe was not in the room, and Joe's bed was empty. Joe had been following me to see me through my adventure, as he always did; but, if Reuben had seen that Joe had been watching us, I know he would never have forgiven him, and so it was just as well as it was. I put the light out, and in a few minutes I heard Joe come into the room and get into bed. Although I was very tired after a hard day's work, I determined to think out the problem of Reuben's visitor. I had scarcely made this determination, when it became clear to me that he was no other than Robinson Crusoe, who had come to insist that all Childs's and Chancellor's omnibus-horses were to be roughed in three minutes, in consequence of the frost. I then proceeded down the Thames in a barge, by the Croydon atmospheric railway; and then I gave it up as a bad job, and went on the excursion which we all, I hope, go at night. May yours be a pleasant one to-night, my dear reader — pleasanter than any which Reuben's friend, the pigeon-fancier, is at all likely to make.

CHAPTER XXI.

GERTY GOES ON THE WAR-TRAIL.

BELOW the city of Palmerston, which was situated just at the head of the tideway, the river Street found its way to the sea in long reaches, which were walled in, to the very water's edge, by what is called in the colony teascrub — a shrub not very unlike the tamarisk, growing dense and thick, about fifteen feet high, on the muddy bank, eaten out by the wash of many steamboats. But, above the tideway, the river was very different. If you went up, you had scarcely passed the wharves of the city before you found yourself in a piece of real primeval forest, of nearly two thousand acres, left by James Oxton from the very first; which comprised a public park, a botanic garden, and the paddock of the police-station. This domain sloped gently down to the river on either side, and the river was no sooner relieved

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from the flat tideway than it began to run in swift long shallows of crystal water, under hanging woodlands, — in short, to become useless, romantic, and extremely beautiful.

Passing upward beyond the Government Reserve, as this beautiful tract was called, you came into the magnificent grounds of the Government House. The house itself, a long, white, castellated building, hung aloft on the side of a hill overhead, and was backed by vast sheets of dark green woodland. From the windows the lawn stooped suddenly down, a steep slope into the river, here running in a broad deep reach, hugging the rather lofty hills, on the lower range of which the house was situated.

Immediately beyond the Government House, and on the other side of the river, was a house of a very different character. The river, keeping, as I said, close to the hills, left on the other side a great level meadow, which, in consequence of the windings of the stream, was a mere low peninsula, some five hundred acres in extent, round which it swept in a great still, deep, circle. At the isthmus of the peninsula, on a rib of the higher land behind, a ridge of land ran down, and, forming the isthmus itself, was lost at once in the broad river-flat below. There stood the residence of our friend the Hon. James Oxton.

It was a typical house, — the house of a wealthy man who had not always been wealthy, but who had never been vulgar and pretentious. It was a perfectly honest house; it *meant* something. It meant this: that James Oxton required a bigger house now that he was worth a quarter of a million than he did when he was merely the cadet of an English family, sent here to sink or swim with the only two thousand pounds he was ever likely to see without work. And yet that house showed you at a glance that the owner did not consider himself to have risen in the social world one single step. He had always been a gentleman, said the house, and he never can be more or less. Ironmongers from Bar Street might build magnificent Italian villas, as an outward and visible proof that they had made their fortunes, and had become gentlemen beyond denial or question. James Oxton still lived comfortably between weather-board, and under shingle, just as in the old times when ninety-nine hundredths of the Colony was a howling wilderness; *he* could not rise or fall.

Yet his house, in its peculiar way, was a very fine one indeed. Strangers in the Colony used to mistake it for a great barracks, or a great tan-yard, or something of that sort. Fifteen years before he had erected a simple wooden-house of weather-board, with a high-pitched shingle roof. As he had grown, so had his house grown. As he had more visitors, he required more bedrooms; as he kept more horses, he required more stables, consequently more shingle and weather-boards: and so now his house

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consisted of three large gravelled quadrangles, surrounded by one-storied buildings, with high-pitched roofs and very deep verandas. There was hardly a window in the whole building; nothing but glass doors opening to the ground, which were open for five or six months in the year.

An English lady might have objected to this arrangement. She might have said that it was not convenient to come in and find a tame kangaroo, as big as a small donkey, lying on his side on the hearth-rug, pensively tickling his stomach with his forepaws; or for six or eight dogs, large and small, to come in from an expedition, and, finding the kangaroo in possession of the best place, dispose themselves, as comfortably as circumstances would allow, on ottomans and sofas, until they rose up with one accord and burst furiously out, barking madly, on the most trivial alarm, or even on none at all. An English lady, I say, might have objected to this sort of thing, but Aggy Oxton never dreamt of it. Mrs. Quickly objected to it, both on the mother's account and on that of the blessed child, not to mention her own; but Mrs. Oxton never did. It was James's house, and they were James's dogs. It must be right.

I mentioned Mrs. Quickly just this moment. I was forced to do so. The fact of the matter is, that at this time — that is to say, on the very day on which George Hillyar had his interview with Samuel Burton in his office — the whole of these vast premises, with their inhabitants, were under her absolute dominion, with the exception of the dogs, who smelt her contemptuously, wondering what she wanted there, and the cockatoo, who had delivered himself over as a prey to seven screaming devils, and, having bit Mrs. Quickly, had been removed to the stables, rebellious and defiant.

For there was a baby now. James Oxton had an heir for his honors and his wealth. The shrewd Secretary, the hard-bitten man of the world, the man who rather prided himself at being thoroughly conversant with all the springs of men's actions, had had a new lesson these last few days. There was a sensation under his broad white waistcoat now, so very, very different from anything he had ever felt before, and so strangely pleasant. He tried to think what it was most like. It was nearest akin to anxiety, he thought. He told his wife that he felt it in the same place, but that it was very different. After all, he did not know, on second thoughts, that it *was* so very like anxiety. He thought, perhaps, that the yearning regret for some old friend who had died in England without bidding him good-bye, was most like this wonderful new sensation of child-love.

But, whatever it was most like, there it was. All the interlacing circles of politics, ambition, business, and family anxiety,

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had joined their lines into one; and here, the centre of it all, lay his boy, his first-born, heir to 150,000 acres, on his pale wife's knee.

He was an anxious man that day. The party which was afterwards to rise and sweep him away for a time, the party of the farmers and shopkeepers, recruited by a few radical merchants and some squatters, smarting under the provisions of James Oxton's Seal Bill, and officered, as the ultra-party in a colony always is, by Irishmen, — the party represented in the House by Mr. Phelim O'Ryan, and in the press by the *Mohawk*, — had shown their strength for the first time that day; and, as a proof of their patriotism, had thrown out, on the third reading (not having been able to whip in before), the Government District-Building-Surveyor's-Bill, the object of which was to provide that the town should be built with some pretensions to regularity, and that every man should get his fair money's worth out of the bricklayer. It was thrown out, wholesome and honest as it was, as a first taste of the tender mercies and good sense of a party growing stronger day by day. James Oxton had cause to be anxious; he saw nothing before him but factious opposition, ever growing stronger to every measure he proposed; no business to be comfortably done until they, the Mohawks, were strong enough to take office, which would be a long while. And, when they were — Oh heavens! Phelim O'Ryan, Brian O'Donoghue! It would n't do to think of.

And George Hillyar? About this proposition of his of going to England? The Secretary was strongly of opinion that he ought to go, and to make it up with his father, and to set things right, and to give Gerty her proper position in the world; but George would n't go. He was obstinate about it. He said that his father hated him, and that it was no use. "He is a short-necked man," argued James Oxton to himself, "and is past sixty. He may go off any moment; and there is nothing to prevent his leaving three-quarters of his property to this cub Erne, — the which thing I have a strong suspicion he has done already. In which case George and Gerty will be left out in the cold, as the Yankees say. Which will be the deuse and all: for George has strong capabilities of going to the bad left in him still. I wish George would take his pretty little wife over to England, and make his court with the old man while there is time. But he won't, confound him!"

The poor Secretary, you see, had cause enough for anxiety. And when he was in one of what his wife chose to call his Sadducee humors, he would have told you that anxiety was merely a gnawing sensation behind the third button of your waistcoat, counting from the bottom. When, however, he came into the

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drawing-room, and saw his boy on his wife's lap, and Gerty kneeling before her, the sensation, though still behind the same button, was not that of anxiety, but the other something spoken of above.

The baby had been doing prodigies. He was informed of it in a burst of female volubility. It had wimmicked. Not once or twice, but three times had that child wimmicked at its aunt as she knelt there on that identical floor under your feet. Mrs. Oxton was confirmed in this statement by Gerty, and Gerty by Mrs. Quickly. There was no doubt about it. If the child went on at this pace, it would be taking notice in less than a month!

This was better than politics, — far better. Confound O'Ryan and all the rest of them. He said, there and then, that he had a good mind to throw politics overboard and manage his property. "Will you have the goodness to tell me, Gerty," he said, "what prevents my doing so? Am I not poorer in office? Is it not unendurable that I, for merely patriotically giving up my time and talents to the colony, am to be abused by an Irish adventurer; have my name coupled with Lord Castlereagh's (the fool *meant* to be offensive, little dreaming that I admire Lord Castlereagh profoundly); and be unfavorably compared to Judas Iscariot? I'll pitch the whole thing overboard, and take old George into partnership, and let them ruin the colony their own way. Why should n't I?"

Gerty did n't know. She never knew anything. She thought it would be rather nice. Mrs. Oxton remarked, quietly, that three days before he had been furiously abusing the upper classes in America, as cowardly and unprincipled, for their desertion of politics, and their retirement into private life.

"There, *you* are at it now," said the Secretary. "How often I have told you not to remember my opinions in that way, and bring them up unexpectedly. You are a disagreeable woman, and I am very sorry I ever married you."

"You should have married Lesbia Burke, my love," said Mrs. Oxton. "We always thought you would. Did n't we, Gerty?"

"No, dear, I think not," said simple Gerty; "I think you forget. Don't you remember that poor mamma always used to insist so positively that Mary was to marry Willy Morton; that you were to marry James; and that I was to marry either Dean Maberly, or Lord George Staunton, unless some one else turned up? I am sure I am right, because I remember how cross she was at your walking with Willy Morton at the Nicnicabarler pic-nic. She said, if you remember, that you were both wicked and foolish, — wicked, to spoil your elder sister's game, and more foolish than words could say if you attempted to play fast and loose with James. I remember how frightened I was at her.

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'If you think James Oxton is to be played the fool with, you little stupid,' she said — "

"The girl is mad," said Mrs. Oxton, blushing and laughing at the same time. "She has gone out of her mind. Her memory is completely gone."

"Dear me!" said Gerty, looking foolishly round; "I suppose I ought n't to have told all that before James. I am terribly silly sometimes. But, Lord bless you, it won't make any difference to him."

Not much, judging from the radiant smile on his face. He was intensely delighted. He snapped his fingers in his wife's face. "So Willy Morton was the other string to her bow, hey? Oh Lord!" he said, and then burst out into a shout of merry laughter. Mrs. Oxton would not be put down. She said that it was every word of it true, and that, idiot as Willy Morton was, he would never have snapped his fingers in his wife's face. Gerty could n't understand the fun. She thought they were in earnest, and that she was the cause of it all. Mrs. Oxton saw this, and pointed it out to the Secretary. He would have laughed at her anxiety, but he saw she was really distressed; so he told her in his kind, quiet way, that there was such love and confidence between him and her sister as even the last day of all, when the secrets of all hearts should be known, could not disturb for one instant.

She was, possibly, a little frightened by the solemnity with which he said this, for she stood a little without answering; and Mr. Oxton and his wife, comparing notes that evening, agreed that her beauty grew more wonderful day by day.

For a moment, she stood, with every curve in her body seeming to droop the one below the other, and her face vacant and puzzled; but suddenly, with hardly any outward motion, the curves seemed to shift upwards, her figure grew slightly more rigid, her head was turned slightly aside, her lips parted, and her face flushed and became animated.

"I hear him," she said; "I hear his horse's feet brushing through the fern. He is coming, James and Aggy. I know what a pity it is I am so silly — "

"My darling, — " broke out Mr. Oxton.

"I know what I mean, sister dear. He should have had a cleverer wife than me. Do you think I am so silly as not to see that? Here he is."

She ran out to meet him. "By George, Aggy," said the Secretary, kissing his wife, "if that fellow *does* turn Turk to her — "

He had no time to say more, for George and Gerty were in the room, and the Secretary saw that George's face was haggard and anxious, and began to grow anxious too.

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"I am glad we are all here together alone," said George. "I want an important family talk. Mrs. Quickly would you mind going?"

Mrs. Quickly had, unnoticed, heard all that had passed before, and seemed inclined to hear more. She winced, and ambled, and bridled, and said something about the blessed child, whereupon Mrs. Oxton, like a shrewd body, gave her the baby to take away with her, reflecting that if she tried to listen at the key-hole, the baby would probably make them aware of the fact.

"I look pale and anxious, I know," said George. "I am going to tell you why. Has Gerty told you what she told me last week!"

Yes, she had.

"I have been thinking over the matter all day, all day," said George, wearily, "and I have come to the conclusion that that circumstance makes an immense difference. Don't you see how, Oxton?"

"I think I do," said the Secretary.

George looked wearily and composedly at him, and said, "I mean this, my dear Oxton; I steadily refused to pay court to my father before, partly because I thought it useless, and partly because my pride forbade me. This news of Gerty's alters everything. For the sake of my child, I must eat my pride, and try to resume my place as the head of the house. Therefore, I think I will accede to your proposal, and go to England."

"My good George," said Mrs. Oxton, taking him by both hands, "my wise, kind George, we are so sure it will be for the best?"

"My boy," said the Secretary, "you are right. I cannot tell you how delighted I am at your decision. I wish I was going. Oh heavens! if I could only go. And I will go, and actually see old Leecroft, and Gerty shall take a kiss to my mother. Hey, Gerty? She would know you if she met you in the street, from my description. Shall you be in time to get off by the *Windsor*?"

"Oh Lord, no," said George, losing color for an instant; "we could n't possibly go by that ship. No; we could not be ready by then."

"I suppose you could n't," said the Secretary. "I was thinking for a moment, George, that you were as impatient as I should be."

"Hardly that," said George. "My errand home is a different sort of one from yours."

So George got leave of absence, and went home; partly to see whether or no he could, now a family was in prospect, get on some better terms with his father, and partly because, since he had the interview with Samuel Burton, everything seemed to

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have grown duller and blanker to him. His first idea was to put sixteen thousand miles of salt water between him and this man, and his purpose grew stronger every time he remembered the disgraceful tie that bound them together.

So they went. As the ship began to move through the green water of the bay, Gerty stood weeping on the quarter-deck, clinging to George's arm. The shore began to fade rapidly; the happy, happy shore, on which she had spent her sunny, silly life. The last thing she saw through her tears was the Secretary, standing at the end of the pier, waving his hat, and Aggy beside him. When she looked up again, some time after, the old familiar shore was but a dim blue cloud, and, with a sudden chill of terror, she found herself separated from all who knew her and loved her, save one, — alone, on the vast, heaving, pitiless ocean, with George Hillyar.

For one instant, she forgot herself. She clutched his arm, and cried out, "George, George! let us go back. I am frightened, George. I want to go back to Aggy and James. Take me back to James! Oh, for God's sake, take me back!"

"It is too late now, Gerty," said George, coldly, "You and I are launched in the world together alone, to sink or swim. The evening gets chill. Go to your cabin."

The Secretary stamped his foot on the pier, and said, "God deal with him as he deals with her!" But his wife caught his hands in hers, and said, "James, James! don't say that. Who are we that we should make imprecations? Say, God help them both."

CHAPTER XXII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: VERY LOW COMPANY.

Reuben's friend, the pigeon-fancier, never showed in public. I asked Rube, after a day or two, whether he was there still, and Rube answered that he was there still, off and on. I was very sorry to hear it, though I could hardly have told any one why.

Reuben never came in of a night now; at least never came to sit with us. Sometimes he would come in for a few minutes, with his pockets always full of bulls'-eyes and rock and such things, and would give them to the children, looking steadily at Emma all the while, and then go away again. He would not let me come up to his room. He seemed not at all anxious to con-

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ceal the fact, that there was some one who came there who was, to put it elegantly, an ineligible acquaintance. My father became acquainted with the fact, and was seriously angry about it. But Reuben had correctly calculated on my father's good nature and disinclination to act. Reuben knew that my father would only growl; he knew he would never turn him out.

Very early in my story I hinted that Alsatia was just round the corner from Brown's Row. Such was the fact. In Danvers Street and Lawrence Street, west and east of us, might be found some very queer people indeed; and, as I have an objection to give their names, I shall give them fictitious ones. I have nothing whatever to say against Mrs. Quickly, or of the reasons which led to her emigration. She hardly comes into question just now, for she emigrated to Cooksland not long after Fred was born. I repeat that I personally have nothing to say against Mrs. Quickly; she was always singularly civil to me. That she was a foolish and weak woman, I always thought, but I was surprised at the singular repugnance which Emma showed towards her. And Mrs. C——m again. What could have made *her* fly out at the poor woman in that way, and fairly hunt her out of Sidney? And will you tell me why, in the end, not only Emma and Mrs. C——m, but also my mother, had far more tenderness and compassion for that terrible unsexed termagant Mrs. Bardolph (*née* Tearsheet), than for the gentle, civil, soft-spoken Mrs. Quickly? I asked my wife why it was the other day, and she told me that nothing was more difficult to answer than a thoroughly stupid question.

At the time of which I am speaking *now*, Mrs. Quickly had gone to Australia, and the house she had kept in Lawrence Street was kept by Mrs Bardolph and Miss Ophelia Flanagan. Miss Flanagan was a tall raw-boned Irish woman, married to a Mr. Malone. Mrs. Bardolph was a great red-faced coarse Kentish woman, with an upper lip longer than her nose, and a chin as big as both, as strong as a man, and as fierce as a tiger.

This winter she had returned from a short incarceration. There had been a fatal accident in her establishment. Nobody — neither the dozen or fourteen gentlewomen, nor Nym, nor Bardolph, nor Pistol — had any thing to do with it. The man had fallen down stairs and broken his neck accidentally, but neither the Middlesex Magistrates nor the Assistant-Judge could conceal from themselves the fact, that Mrs. Bardolph kept a disorderly house, and so she had to go to Holloway. She had now returned, louder, redder, and angrier than before.

Not many days after the night on which I had gone up into Reuben's room, I had some business in Cheyne Row, and when it was done I came whistling and sauntering homewards. As I

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came into Lawrence Street, I was thinking how pleasant and fresh the air came up from the river, when I was attracted by the sound of people talking loudly before me, and, looking up, I saw at the corner of the passage which leads by the Dissenting chapel into Church Street, this group —

Miss Flanagan and Mrs. Bardolph, leaning against the railings with their arms folded; Mr. Nym, Mr. Bardolph, and Mr. Pistol (I know who I mean well enough); a dozen or fourteen gentlewomen, Bill Sykes, Mrs. Gamp, Moll Flanders, and my cousin Reuben. There was a man also, who leant against a post with his back towards me, whose face I could not see.

As I came near them, they stopped talking, every one of them, and looked at me. To any lad of nearly eighteen, not born in London or one of the chief towns in Australia, this would have been confusing; to *me* it was a matter of profound indifference. I was passing them with a calm stare, by no means expressive of curiosity, when Mrs. Bardolph spoke:

"Hallo, young Bellus-and-tongs! What's up?"

I replied to her, not in many words. There was a roar of laughter from the whole gang; she looked a little angry for a moment, but laughed good-naturedly directly afterwards. Then I was sorry for what I had said. But you had to keep your tongue handy in those times, I assure you.

"Never you mind the stirabout, you monkey," she said; "my constitution wanted reducing; I was making a deal too much flesh. Take your cousin home and mind him, you cheeky gonoff; don't you see that the devil has come for him?"

There was another laugh at this, and I turned and looked at the gentleman who was leaning against the corner-post, and who was laughing as loud as any one. I was not impressed in this gentleman's favor; but I was strongly impressed with the idea that this was the gentleman who had snored so loud one night he had slept in Reuben's room. But I only laughed too. I said to Mrs. Bardolph, that Rube knew his home and his friends a good deal better than she could tell him, and so I went on my way, and, as I went, heard Miss Flanagan remark that I was a tonguey young divole, but had something the look of my sisther about the eyee.

I was glad that Erne came to see me that night, for I was terribly vexed and ill at ease at finding Reuben in such company: in company so utterly depraved that I have chosen, as you see, to designate them by Shakespearian names. It was not because I wished to confide in him that I was glad to see him. I had no intention of doing that. If I had, in the first place I should have been betraying Reuben; in the second, I should have been ashamed; and in the third, I should have been telling the difficulty to

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a person as little likely to understand it and assist one out of it as any one I know. Erne's childish simplicity in all worldly matters was a strange thing to see.

No. It was for this reason I was glad to see Erne. I was vexed, and the fact of his sitting beside me soothed me and made me forget my vexation. Why? you ask. Well, there you have me. I have not the very least idea in the world why. I only know that when Erne was sitting with me I had a feeling of contentment which I never had at other times. We never spoke much to one another; hardly ever, unless we were alone, and then only a few words; nothing in themselves, but showing that we understood one another thoroughly. Erne's powers of conversation were entirely reserved for Emma and Joe. But they told me that, if I was out when he came, he was quite distraught and absent; that he would never talk his best unless I was present, — though he would, perhaps, only notice my coming by taking my hand and saying, "How do, old fellow?" A curious fact these boy-friendships! A wise schoolmaster told me the other day that he should not know what to do without them, and that he had to utilize them. They are, I think, all very well until Ferdinand meets Miranda. After that, they must take their chance. At this time, it was only child Erne who was in love with child Emma. As yet, I was the centre round which Erne's world revolved. I had not gone to the wall as yet.

"Hallo!" said Erne, when he burst in. "I say, is Jim here? I say, old fellow, I want to talk to you most particularly. Where 's Emma, old fellow? Fetch Emma for me; I want to have a talk about something very particular indeed. A regular council of war, Joe. You Hammersmith, you need n't say anything; you listen, and reserve your opinion. Do you hear?"

I remember that he shook hands with me, and I remember smiling to see his white delicate fingers clasped in my own black hand. Then Emma came sweeping in, and her broad noble face shaped itself into one great smile to welcome him; and he asked her to give him a kiss, and she gave him one, and you must make the best of it you can, or the worst that you dare. And then she passed on to her place by the fire with Frank and Harry, and Fred hanging to her skirts, and sat down to listen.

The court was opened by Erne. He said, "My elder brother is come home." There were expressions of surprise from Joe and Emma.

"Yes," said Erne. "He is come home. Emma, I want to ask you this: If you had a brother you had never seen, do you think you could love him?"

Emma said, "Yes. That she should certainly love him, merely from being her brother."

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"But suppose," said Erne, "that you had never heard anything but evil about him. Should you love him then?"

"Yes," said Emma; "I would n't believe the evil. And so I should be able to love him."

"But," said Erne, "that is silly nonsense. Suppose that you were *forced* to believe everything bad against him?"

"I would n't without proof," said resolute Emma.

"But suppose you *had* proof, you very obstinate and wrong-headed girl. Supposing the proofs of his ill behavior were perfectly conclusive. Suppose that."

"Supposing that," said the undaunted Emma, "is supposing a good deal. Suppose that I was to suppose, that you had taken the whole character of your brother from second-hand, and had never taken the trouble or had the opportunity to find out the truth. Suppose that."

"Well," said Erne, after a pause, "that *is* the case, after all. But you need n't be so aggravating and determined; I only asked your opinion. I wanted you to —"

"To hound you on till you formed the faction against your brother, eh?" said Emma. "Now, you may be offended or not; you may get up and leave this room to-night; but you shall hear the truth. Joe and I have talked over this ever since you told us that your brother was expected a fortnight ago, and I am expressing Joe's opinion and my own. Every prejudice you take towards that man lowers you in the estimation of those who love you best. You sit there, I see, like a true gentleman, without anger or malice; you encourage me to go on to the end and risk the loss of your acquaintance by doing so (it is Joe who is speaking, not I); but I tell you boldly, that your duty, as a gentleman, is to labor night and day to bring your brother once more into your father's favor. It will ruin you, in a pecuniary point of view, to do so; but, if you wish to be a man of honor and a gentleman, if you wish to be with us all the same Erne Hillyar that we have learnt to love so dearly, you must do so."

"I have two things more to say," continued Emma, whose color, heightened during her speech, was now fading again. "Jim, your dear Hammersmith, knew nothing whatever of this speech I have made you. It was composed by Joe, and I agree with every word, every letter of it; and that is all I have to say, Erne Hillyar."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS AMONG THE TOMBS.

My brother Joe had at one time made a distinct request to my father that he should learn the trade, in which he was backed up by my mother, for the rather inscrutable reason that any trade was better than coopering. It was a perfectly undeniable proposition, but was somewhat uncalled for, because the question with Joe was not between smith-work and cooper-work, but between hand-work and head-work, — whether he should become an artisan or a scholar.

It was that busybody Emma that persuaded him in the end, of course, by quietly depreciating me, and by flattering Joe's intellect. During the time that the matter was in debate, she assumed a pensive air, and used to heave little sighs when she looked at Joe, and was so misguided once as to dust a chair I had been sitting in. After this I was taken with a sudden affection for her, and, having made my face seven times dirtier than usual, had embraced her tenderly. I also put a cinder in her tea, which brought matters to a crisis, for we both burst out laughing; and I called her a stuck-up humbug, which thing she acknowledged with graceful humility, and before I had time to turn round had made me promise to add my persuasion to hers, and persuade Joe to become a scholar.

I did so, and turned the scale. Joe continued at school, first as pupil, and secondly as an underteacher, until he was sixteen, at which time it became apparent to Mr. Faulkner that Joe was giving promise of becoming a very first-rate man indeed.

He expressed this opinion to Mr. Compton, who called upon him one day for the purpose of asking him his opinion of Joe. A very few days after he came to my father, and said that Sir George Hillyar begged to take the liberty of advising that Mr. Joseph Burton should remain where he was a short time longer; after which Sir George "would have great pleasure in undertaking to provide employment for those extraordinary talents which he appeared to be developing."

"Well," said Joe, with a radiant face; "if this ain't — I mean is not — the most ex-tra-*awd*inary, I ever."

I said that I never did n't, neither.

My father whistled, and looked seriously and inquiringly at Mr. Compton.

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"I don't know why," answered Mr. Compton, just as if my father had spoken. "Erne's ——, I mean," continued he, with a stammer, at which Miss Emma got as red as fire, "I mean Erne's friend's brother there, Reuben's cousin — Law bless you! fifty ways of accounting for it. But, as for knowing anything, I don't, and, what is more, old Morton the keeper don't know, and, when he don't know, why, you know, who is to?"

"Certainly, sir," said my father. "So old Morton he don't know nothink, don't he. Well! Well!"

However, this was very good news indeed. We should have Joe with us for some time longer, and the expectation of the first loss to the family circle was lying somewhat heavy on our hearts. And then, when he did leave us, it would be with such splendid prospects. My mother said it would not in the least surprise her to see Joe in a draper's shop of his own, — which idea was scornfully scouted by the rest of us, who had already made him Prime Minister. In the mean time I was very anxious to see Erne and thank him, and to know why Miss Emma should have blushed in that way.

Erne evidently wanted to see me for some purpose also, for he wrote to me to ask me to meet him at the old place the next Sunday afternoon.

The "old place" was a bench which stood in front of Sir Thomas More's monument, close to the altar-rails of the old church. We promised that we would all come and meet him there.

It is so long ago since we began to go to the old church, on Sunday afternoon in winter, and in the evening in summer, that I cannot attempt to fix the date. It had grown to be a habit when I was very, very young, for I remember that church with me used at one time to mean the old church, and that I used to consider the attendance on the new St. Luke's, in Robert Street, more as a dissipation, than an act of devotion.

My mother tells me that she used first to take me there about so and so, — meaning a period when I was only about fourteen months old. My mother is a little too particular in her dates, and her chronology is mainly based on a system of rapidly recurring eras: a system which, I notice, is apt to spread confusion and dismay among the ladies of the highly-genteel rank to which we have elevated ourselves. However, to leave mere fractions of time, of no real importance, to take care of themselves, she must have taken me to the old church almost as soon as my retina began to carry images to my brain, for I can remember Lord and Lady Dacre, with their dogs at their feet, before I can remember being told by Mrs. Quickly, that the doctor had been for a walk round the parsley-bed, and had

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brought me a little brother from among the gooseberry-bushes: which was her metaphorical way of announcing the fact of my brother Joe's birth.

At first, I remember, I used to think that all the statues were of the nature of Guy Fawkes, and were set up there to atone for sins committed in the flesh. From this heretical and pagan frame of mind I was rescued by learning to read; and then I found that these images and monuments were not set up for warning, but for example. I began to discover that these people who had died, and had their monuments set up here, were, by very long odds, the best people who ever lived. I was, for a time, puzzled about those who had their epitaphs written in Latin, I confess. Starting on the basis, that every word in every epitaph was strictly true, I soon argued myself into the conclusion that the Latin epitaphs were written in that language for the sake of sparing the feelings of the survivors; and that they were the epitaphs of people about whom there was something queer, or, at all events, something better reserved for the decision of the scholastic few who understood Latin. At a very early age I became possessed with the idea that when Mrs. Quickly died it would become necessary, for the sake of public morality, to write her epitaph in Latin. I can't tell you how I came to think so. I never for a moment doubted that such an excellent and amiable woman would have a very large tomb erected to her by a grateful country; but I never for a moment doubted that it would become necessary to have a Latin inscription on it.

But conceive how I was astonished by finding, when I was a great fellow, that the Latin inscriptions were quite as complimentary as the English. Joe translated a lot of them for me. It was quite evident that such people as the Chelsea people never lived. So far from Latin being used with a view of hiding any little *faux pas* of the eminent deceased from the knowledge of the ten-pound householders, it appeared that the older language had been used merely because the miserable bastard *patois*, which Shakespeare was forced to use, but which Johnson very properly rejected with decision, was utterly unfit to express the various virtues of these wonderful Chelsea people, of whom, with few exceptions, no one ever heard. It used to strike me, however, that, among the known or the unknown, Sir Thomas More was the most obstinately determined that posterity should hear his own account of himself.

My opinion always was, that the monuments which were in the best state were those of the Hillyars and of the Duchess of Northumberland. There are no inscriptions on these, with the exception of the family names. The members of the family

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are merely represented kneeling one behind the other with their names — in the one case above their heads, in the other, on a brass beneath. The Dacres, with their dogs at their feet, are grand; but, on the whole, give me the Hillyars, kneeling humbly, with nothing to say for themselves. Let the Dacres carry their pride and their dogs to the grave with them if they see fit; let them take their braches, and lie down to wait for judgment. Honest John Hillyar will have no dogs, having troubles enough beside. He and his family prefer to kneel, with folded hands, until the last trump sound from the East, or until Chelsea Church crumble into dust.

I always loved that monument better than any in Chelsea Old Church. 'T is a good example of a mural monument of that time, they say, but they have never seen it on a wild autumn afternoon, when the sun streams in on it from the southwest, lights it up for an instant, and then sends one long ray quivering up the wall to the roof, and dies. What do they know about the monument at such a time as that? Still less do they know of the fancies that a shock-headed, stupid blacksmith's boy — two of whose brothers were poets, and whose rant he used to hear — used to build up in his dull brain about it, as he sat year after year before it, until the kneeling figures became friends to him.

For I made friends of them in a way. They were friends of another world. I found out enough to know that they were the images of a gentleman and his family who had lived in our big housé in Church Street three hundred years ago; and, sitting by habit in the same place, Sunday after Sunday, they became to me real and actual persons, who were as familiar to me as our neighbors, and yet who were dead and gone to heaven or hell three hundred years before, — people who had twenty years' experience of the next world to show, where I had one to show of this present life; people who had solved the great difficulty, and who could tell me all about it, if they would only turn their heads and speak. Yes, these Hillyars became real people to me, and I, in a sort of way, loved them.

I gave them names in my own head. I loved two of them. On the female side I loved the little wee child, for whom there was very small room, and who was crowded against the pillar, kneeling on the skirts of the last of her big sisters. And I loved the big lad who knelt directly behind his father, between the knight himself, and the two little brothers, dressed so very like blue-coat boys, such quaint little fellows as they were.

I do not think that either Joe or Emma ever cared much about this tomb or its effigies. Though we three sat there together so very often for several winters, I do not think it ever took their attention very much; and I, being a silent lad, never gave loose

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to my fancies about that family monument even to them. I used to find, in the burst of conversation which always follows the release of young folks from church, that we all three, like most young people, had not attended to the sermon at all; but that our idle fancies, on those wild winter afternoons, had rambled away in strangely different directions. I always used to sit between the two others, upright, with my head nearly against the little shield which carries the date, "Anno, 1539." Soon after the sermon had begun I used to find that Joe's great head was heavy on one shoulder, while Emma had laid her cheek quietly against the other, and had stolen her hand into mine. And so we three would sit, in a pyramidal group, of which I was the centre, dreaming.

I used to find that Joe would be building fancies of the dead who lay around us, of what they had done, and of what they might have done, had God allowed them to foresee the consequences of their actions; but that Emma had been listening to the rush of the winter-wind among the tombs outside, and the lapping of the winter-tide upon the shore, — thinking of those who were tossed far away upon stormy seas, only less pitiless than the iron coast on which they burst in their cruel fury.

I cannot tell how often, or how long, we three sat there. But I know that the monument had a new interest to me after I made Erne Hillyar's acquaintance, and began to realize that the kneeling figures there were his ancestors. I tried then to make Erne the living take his place, in my fancy, among the images of his dead forefathers and uncles; but it was a failure. He would not come in it all. So then I began trying to make out which of them he was most like; but he was n't a bit like any one of them. They none of them would look round at you with their heads a little on one side, and their great blue-black eyes wide open, and their lips half-parted as though to wait for what you were going to say. These ancestors of his were but brass after all, and knelt one behind the other looking at the backs of one another's heads. Erne would not fit in among them by any means.

But one day, one autumn afternoon, as I sat with Emma on one side, and Joe on the other, with my back to Sir Thomas More's tomb and my face to Sir John Hillyar's, thinking of these things, I got a chance of comparing the living with the dead. For, when the sermon was half-way through, I heard the little door, which opens straight from the windy wharf into the quiet chancel, opened stealthily; and, looking round, I saw that Erne had come in, and was sending those big eyes of his ranging all over the church to look for something which was close by all the time. I saw him stand close to me, for a minute, moving his noble head from side to side as he peered about him, like an emu who has wandered into a stockyard; but as soon as he had swept

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the horizon, and had brought his eyes to range nearer home, he saw me. And then he smiled, and I knew that he had come to find us.

And after service we walked out together. And the sexton let us into that quiet piece of the church-yard which overlooks the river, and we stood there long into the twilight, talking together as we leant against the low wall. Erne stood upon the grave of the poor Hillyar girl who had died in our house, as his habit was, talking to me and looking at Emma. The time went so quick that it was dark before we got home; but we all discovered that it was a very capital way of having a talk together, and so, without any arrangement at all, we found ourselves there again very often. Once Emma and I went along with Frank; but Frank, having eaten a dinner for six, went to sleep, and not only went to sleep, but had the nightmare, in a manner scandalously audible to the whole congregation, in the first lesson. Emma had to take him out, and when I came out at the end of the service, I found that Erne and Emma were together by the river-wall, and no one else but Frank. He had seen her coming out, and had stayed with her for company. It was very kind of him, and I told him so. He called me an old fool.

The Sunday afternoon on which we were to meet Erne was a wild and gusty one, the wind sweeping drearily along the shore, and booming and rushing among the railings around the tombs. My sister and I went alone, and sat on the old bench: but no Erne made his appearance, and soon I had ceased to think much of him.

For there came in and sat opposite to me, — directly under the Hillyar monument, — the most beautiful lady I had ever seen. She was very young, with a wonderfully delicate complexion, and looked so very fragile, that I found myself wondering what she did abroad in such wild weather. She was dressed in light gray silk, which gave her a somewhat ghostly air; and she looked slightly worn and anxious, though not enough to interfere with her almost preternatural beauty. When I say that I had never seen such a beautiful woman as she was, I at once find that I can go farther, and say, that I have never since seen any one as beautiful as she by a long interval. My wife was singularly handsome at one time.* Mrs. Oxton, when I first saw her, was certainly beautiful. Lady Hainault, my namesake, as I reminded her once, was, and is, glorious; but they none of them could ever have compared, for an instant, with that young lady in gray silk, who came and sat on the bench, under the

* The Hon. Mrs. Burton presents her compliments to the Editor, and begs to inform him that this is the first she ever heard of it.

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Hillyar monument, opposite my sister and me, on that wild autumn afternoon.

She came in by the little side door which opens from the chancel on to the river. She sat down on the bench opposite me, beside a poor cracked old sempstress, whose devotions were disturbed every five minutes by her having to put down her prayer-book and hunt spiders, and old Smith the blind man, who used to say his responses in a surly, defiant tone of voice, as if every response was another item in a bill against heaven, which had already run too long, and ought to have been paid long ago.

But she sat down in this fantastic company, and seemed glad to rest. Mrs. Smith, the pew-opener, the blind man's wife, caught sight of a strange sail in the offing, bore down, and would have brought her into a pew. But the strange lady said that she was tired, and would sit where she was.

There was a gentleman with her, by the by. A tall gentleman, very pale, rather anxious-looking, without any hair on his face. He asked her, was n't she afraid of the draught? And she said, "No. Please, please dear, let me sit here. I want rest, dear. Do let me sit here." And when she said this two ideas came into my head. The first was that the beautiful lady was, for some reason, afraid of the pale, anxious gentleman; and the second was that they were Americans, because, — although they both spoke perfectly good English, yet they seemed to have no hesitation about speaking out loud in church; which they most decidedly did, and which, as I am informed now, the Americans, as a general rule, do not.

No Erne made his appearance. Emma and I sat on our accustomed bench, with the beautiful, weary lady opposite. The wind rattled at the old casements, and when the sermon began a storm of sleet came driving along from the westward, and made the atmosphere freezing cold. The strange beautiful lady seemed to cower under it, to draw herself together and to draw her shawl closer and closer around her, with a look almost of terror on her face. The poor lunatic woman, who sat beside her, put up her umbrella. The pew-opener saw her, and came up and fought her for it, with a view to making her put it down again. The cracked woman was very resolute, and Mrs. Smith was (as I think) unnecessarily violent, and between them they drove one of the points of the umbrella into Smith's eye; which, as Smith was blind already did n't matter much, but which caused him a deal of pain, and ended in shovings and recriminations between Mrs. Smith and the cracked woman. And the beautiful lady, in the middle of it all, finding no rest anywhere, came across wearily and feebly and sat beside Emma. She did not faint or make any scene; but when I looked round soon after I saw her

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head on Emma's shoulder, and Emma's arm round her waist. She was very poorly, but the pale gentleman did not see it.

After service she took his arm, and while the people were crowding out of church I kept near them. I heard her say,—

"I cannot stay to look at the monument to-day, dear; I am very tired."

"Well," said the gentleman, "the carriage won't be long. I told them to meet us here."

She stood actually cowering in the cold blast which swept off the river round the corner of the church. She crouched shuddering close to the pale man and said,—

"What a dreadful country, love. Is it always like this in England? I shall die here I am afraid, and never see Aggy any more, and poor James will be so sorry. But I am quite brave and resolute, George. I would not change my lot with any woman," she continued rather more hastily; "only there is no sun here, and it is so very dark and ugly."

I was glad to hear him speak kindly to her and soothe her, for I could not help fancying that she would have been glad of a gentler companion. But I had little time to think of this, for Erne, coming quickly out the open gate of the church-yard, came up to them and said,—

"Mr. George Hillyar?" I think.

George Hillyar bowed politely, and said, "Yes."

"We ought to know one another," said Erne, laughing; "in fact, I am your brother Erne."

I did not like the look of George Hillyar's face at all; he had an ugly scowl handy for any one who might require it, I could see. But Erne was attracted suddenly by his sister-in-law's beauty, and so he never saw it; by the time he looked into his brother's face again the scowl had passed away, and there was a look of pleased admiration instead. Poor Mrs. Hillyar seemed to brighten up at the sight of Erne. They stood talking together affectionately for a few minutes, and then the George Hillyars drove away, and left Erne and me standing together in the church-yard.

"What a handsome *distingué*-looking fellow," said Erne. "I know I shall like him."

I hoped their liking might be mutual, but had strong doubts on the point.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

SECRETARY OXTON was a wise and clever fellow, but he was liable to err, like the rest of us. Secretary Oxton was an affectionate, good-hearted, honorable man, a gentleman at all points, save one. He was clever and ambitious, and in the grand fight he had fought against the world, in the steady pluckily-fought battle, the object of which was to place him, a younger son, in a position equal to that of his elder brother, to found a new and wealthy branch of the Oxton family, he had contracted a certain fault, from which his elder brother, probably from the absence of temptation, was free.

He had seen that wealth was the key to the position. He had seen, early in the struggle, that a fool with wealth was often of more influence than a wise man without it. And so he had won wealth as a means to the end of power. But the gold had left a little of its dross upon him, and now he was apt to overvalue it.

Acting on this error, he had put before him, as a great end, with regard to George and Gerty Hillyar, that George should go to England and win back his father's favor. His wife, good and clever as she was, was only, after all, a mirror to reflect her husband's stronger will; consequently there was no one to warn him of the folly he was committing, when he urged George so strongly to go to England, — no one to tell him of the danger of allowing such a wild fierce hawk as George to get out of the range of his own influence; of the terrible peril he incurred on behalf of his beloved Gerty, by sending him far away from the gentle home atmosphere, which had begun to do its work upon him so very well, and throwing him headlong among his old temptations, with no better guide than a silly little fairy of a wife.

He could not see all this in his blindness. He did not calculate on the amount of good which had been wrought in George's character by his wife's gentle influence and his own manly counsel. He was blinded by the money question. He did not see that it would be better for Gerty's sake, and for all their sakes, to keep Sir George Hillyer near him with two thousand a year, a busy, happy man, than to have him living in England without control, amongst all his old temptations. He could not bear the idea of that odd eight or nine thousand a year going out of the family. He had worked at money-getting so long that that consideration outweighed, nay, obscured every other.

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And so he encouraged George to go to England. And, when the last grand forest cape was passed, and they were rushing on towards Cape Horn before the west wind, and the dear peaceful old land had died away on the horizon, and was as something which had never been; and when Gerty got penitent, and sea-sick, and tearful, and frightened, and yellow in the face, and everything but cross, — then all the good influences of James and Agnes Oxton were needed, but were not at hand; and such mischief was done as would have made the Secretary curse his own folly if he could have seen it. And there was no one to stay the course of this mischief, but tearful silly sea-sick Gerty

Poor little child of the sun! Poor little bush princess! brought up without a thought or a care on the warm hillside at Neville's Gap, in the quiet house which stood half-way up the mountain, with a thousand feet of feathering woodland behind, and fifty miles of forest and plain before and below. Brought up in a quiet luxurious home, among birds and flowers and pet dogs; a poor little body, the cares in whose life were the arrivals of the pianoforte-tuner on his broken-kneed gray, supposed to be five hundred years old; who had never met with but two adventures in her life before marriage, the first of which she could barely remember, and the second when James and Aggy carried her off in a steamer to Sydney, and Aggy chaperoned her to the great ball at Government House, and she had wondered why the people stared at her so when she walked up the room following in Aggy's wake, as she sailed stately on before towards the presence, until she was told next morning that James had won £500 on her beauty, for that Lady Gipps had pronounced her to be more beautiful than young Mrs. Buckley *née* Brentwood, of Garoopna, in Gippsland.

But here was a change. This low sweeping gray sky, and the wild heaving cold gray sea, and then the horrible cliffs of bitter floating ice, at whose base the hungry sea leaped and slid up, gnawing caverns and crannies, yet pitifully smoothing away, with their ceaseless wash, a glacis, to which the finger of no drowning man might hope to clutch that he might prolong his misery. The sun seemed gone forever, and as they made each degree of southing, Gerty got more shivering and more tearful, and seemed to shrink more and more into her wrappers and cloaks.

But all this had a very different effect on Mrs. Nalder. On that magnificent American woman it had a bracing effect; it put new roses into her face, and made her stand firmer on her marine continuations, — had I been speaking about an English duchess I should have said her sea-legs. She was n't sick, not she; but Nalder was, and so it fell to George's lot to squire Mrs. Nalder, an employment he found to be so charming that he devoted him-

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self to it. Mrs. Nalder got very fond of George, and told her husband so; whereupon Mr. Nalder replied that he was uncommon glad she had found some one to gallivant her round, for that he was darned if he rose out of that under forty south. And, when forty south came, and Gerty made her appearance on deck with Mrs. Nalder, she found that dreadful Yankee woman calling George about here and there, as if he belonged to her. Gerty got instantly jealous, although Mrs. Nalder was kind and gentle to her, and would have been a sister to her. Gerty repulsed her. Mrs. Nalder wondered why. The idea of anybody being sufficiently insane to be jealous of her never entered into her honest head. She asked her husband, who did n't know, but said that Ostrellyan gells were, as a jennle rule, whimsical young cusses.

No. Gerty would have nothing to do with the kind-hearted American woman, for she was bitterly jealous of her. And Mr. Nalder frightened her, that honest tradesman, with his way of prefacing half his remarks by saying "Je-hoshaphat," which frightened her out of her wits for what was coming. His way of thwacking down his right or left bower at eucre, his calling the trump-card the deck-head, his way of eating with his knife, and his reckless noisy *bonhommie*, were all alike, I am sorry to say, disgusting to her; nothing he could do was right; and, after all, Nalder was a good fellow. George got angry with her about her treatment of these people, and scolded her; and he could not scold by halves; he terrified her so that he saw he must never do it again. He put a strong restraint on himself; to do the man justice, he did that; and was as tender and gentle with her as he could be for a time. But his features had been too much accustomed to reflect violent passion to make it possible for him to act his part at all times. Her dull, fearful submission irritated him, and there came times when that irritation, unexpressed in words and actions, would show itself too faithfully in his face; and so that look of pitiable terror which had come into Gerty's great eyes the first time he had sworn at her, that restless shifting of the pupil from side to side, accompanied by a spasmodic quivering of the eyelids, never, never wholly passed away any more. "That he could have cursed her, that he could have snarled at her, and cursed her. It was too horrible. Could James have been right? And Neville's Gap so many thousand miles away, and getting further with every bound of the ship!"

George saw all this, and it made him mad. He found out now that he had got a great deal fonder of beautiful Mrs. Nalder than he had any right to be, and after a week's penitential attention to Gerty he went over to Mrs. Nalder, and begun the *petits soins* business with her once more. But, unluckily for him, Mrs.

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Nalder had found him out. George, poor fool, thought that the American woman's coolness towards him arose from jealousy at his having returned to his wife. He found his mistake. The brave Illinois woman met him with a storm of indignation, and rated him about his treatment of his wife. She had no tact, or she would not have done so, for she only made matters worse.

Of all the foolish things which James Oxton ever did, this was the worst: sending these two out of the range of his own and his wife's influence.

Gerty revived a little in the tropics. The sun warmed her into something like her old self. But all Mrs. Nalder's kindness failed to win her over. She suspected her and was jealous of her; and, besides, the great handsome woman of the Western prairies was offensive to the poor little robin of a creature. She *was* coarse and loud, and her hands were large, and she was so *strong*. She could n't even make Gerty comfortable on a bench without hurting her. And, besides, Gerty could see through all this affected attention which she showed her. Gerty, like most silly women, thought herself vastly clever. Mrs. Nalder was a most arttul and dangerous woman. All this assumed affection might blind her poor husband, but could never blind her.

But the good ship rolled and blundered on, until it grew to be forty north, instead of forty south, and the sunny belt was passed once more, and Gerty began to pine and droop again. George would land at Dover; and he landed in a steamer which came alongside. And the last of the old ship was this, — that all the crew and the passengers stood round looking at her. And Mrs. Nalder came up and kissed her, and said, very quietly, "My dear, we may never meet again, but when we do, you will know me better than you do now. Then Gerty broke into tears, and asked Mrs. Nalder to forgive her, and Mrs. Nalder, that coarse and vulgar person, called her a darling little sunbeam, and wept too, after the Chicago style (and when they do things at Chicago, mind you, they do 'em with a will). Then Gerty was on the deck of the little steamer, and, while she was wondering through her tears why the sides of the ship looked so very high, there came from the deck a sound like a number of glass bells ringing together and ceasing at once; then the sound came again, louder and clearer; and as it came the third time, George raised her arm, and said — "Wave your handkerchief, Gerty; quick, don't you hear them cheering you?"

And, directly afterwards, they stood on the slippery, slimy boards of the pier at Dover, on the dull English winter day; and she looked round at the chalk cliffs, whose crests were shrouded in mist, and at the muddy street, and the dark colored houses, and she said, "Oh, dear, dear me. Is this, this England, George? What a nasty, cold, ugly, dirty place it is."

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SHRISTIAN SAN FRANCISCO

CHAPTER XXV.

GERTY'S FIRST INNINGS.

A VERY few days before Sir George Hillyar received the note which told him of his son's arrival in England, he happened to be out shooting alone, and his keeper saw that he was very anxious and absent, and shot very badly indeed. He conceived that it was Sir George's anxiety about his son's arrival, and thought little about it; but, as the day went on, it became evident that Sir George wanted to broach some subject, and had a hesitation in doing so.

At last he said, — "What state are the boats in, Morton?"

"They are in very good repair, Sir George."

"I think I shall have them painted."

"They were painted last week, Sir George."

"I shall get new oars for them, I fancy."

"The new oars, which you ordered while staying at Kew, came home last Thursday, Sir George."

"H'm. Hey. Then there is no work for a waterman about the lake, is there?"

"None whatever, Sir George."

"Morton, you are a fool. If I had not more tact than you I would hang myself before I went to bed."

"Yes, Sir George."

"Send for the young waterman that we had at Kew, and find him some work about the boats for a few days."

"Yes, Sir George."

"You know whom I mean?"

"No, Sir George."

"Then why the devil did you say you did?"

"I did not, Sir George."

"Then you contradict me?"

"I hope I know my place better, Sir George. But I never did say I knew who you mean, for I don't; in consequence I could n't have said I did. Maark! caawk! Awd drat this jawing in cover, Sir George! Do hold your tongue till we 're out on the heth agin. How often am I to tell you on it?"

So he did. At the next pause in the sport old Morton said, "Now, Sir George, what do you want done?"

"I want that young man, Reuben Burton, whom we had at Kew, fetched over. I want you to make an excuse for his coming to mend the boats. That 's what I want."

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"Then why could n't you have said so at once?" said old Morton to his face.

"Because I did n't choose. If you get so impudent, Morton, I shall be seriously angry with you."

"Ah! I 'll chance all that," said Morton to himself; "you 're easy enough managed by those as knows you. I wonder why he has taken such a fancy to this young scamp. I wonder if he knows he is Sam Burton's son. I suspect he do."

But old Morton said nothing more, and Reuben was sent for to Stanlake.

Sir George was going out shooting again when Reuben came. The old butler told him that the young waterman was come, and Sir George told him that he must wait; but, when Sir George came out, he had got a smile on his face ready to meet the merry young rascal who had amused him so much.

"Hallo! you fellow," he began, laughing; but he stopped suddenly, for the moment he looked at Reuben Burton he saw that there was a great change in him. Reuben had lost all his old vivacity, and had a painfully worn, eager look on his face.

"Why, how the lad is changed!" said Sir George. "You have been falling in love, you young monkey. Go and see to those boats, and put them in order."

Reuben went wearily to work; there was really nothing to do. Sir George merely had him over to gratify a fancy for seeing him again. It may have been that he was disappointed in finding the merry slangy lad he had got to like looking so old and anxious, or it may have been that his nervous anxiety for the approaching interview with his son put Reuben out of his head; but, however it was, Sir George never went near Reuben after the first time he had looked at him, and had seen the change in him. No one will ever know now what was working in Sir George's heart towards Reuben Burton. The absence of all inquiries on his part as to who Reuben was decidedly favors James Burton the elder's notion, that Sir George guessed he was the son of Samuel Burton, and that he did not, having conceived a strange affection for the lad, wish to push his inquiries too far. It may have been this, or it may have been merely an old man's fancy; but even now, when he seemed to have passed the lad by himself, he made Erne go and see him every morning.

"Erne," he said, "that boy is in trouble. In secret trouble. Find his secret out, my child, and let us help him."

But kind and gentle Erne could n't do that. Reuben went as far as telling him that he was in trouble; but also told him that he could say nothing more, for the sake of others.

"I say, old Rube," said Erne, as he sat lolling against the side of a boat which Reuben was mending, "I have found out the whole of the business from beginning to end."

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"Have you, sir?" said Reuben, with a ghost of a smile. "I am glad of it."

"You have been getting into bad company," said Erne.

"Very bad," said Reuben.

"And you are innocent yourself?"

"Yes," said Reuben. "Come. I could n't say as much to every one, Master Erne; but I know, when I say a thing to you, that it won't go any further. Therefore I confide this to your honor, for if you betray me I am lost. I *am* innocent."

Erne laughed. "That is something like your old familiar nonsense, Reuben. Tell me all about it."

"It would be awkward for you if I did, sir."

"Well! well!" said Erne. "I believe in *you*, anyway. I say, does Emma know about it?"

"God bless you, no," said Reuben. "Don't tell her nothing, for God's sake, Master Erne."

"You haven't told me anything, Reuben; so how could I tell her?"

"I mean, don't let her know that Sir George noticed how I was altered. I should like her to think the best of me to the last. If trouble comes, the bitterest part of it will be the being disgraced before her. Don't say anything to *her*."

"Why should I be likely to?" said Erne.

"Why," said Reuben, "I mean, when you and she was sitting together all alone, courting, that you might say this and that, and not put me in the best light. Lord love you, master, *I* know all about that courting business. When the arm is round the waist the tongue won't keep between the teeth."

"But I am not courting Emma," said Erne. "At least—"

"At least or at most, master, you love the ground she walks on. Never mind what your opinion about your own state of mind is. Only be honorable to her. And, when the great smash comes, keep them in mind of me."

"Keep who in mind?" said Erne.

"Jim and Emma. Help 'em to remember me. I should be glad to think that you three thought of me while I was there."

"While you are where?" said Erne, in a very low voice.

"In Coldbath Fields, master," said Reuben. "Now YOU 'VE got it."

One need not say that Erne was distressed by the way in which Reuben spoke of himself. He was very sorry for Reuben, and was prepared to die for him; but—

He was seventeen, and Reuben had accused him of his first love. Poor Reuben, by a few wild words, had let a flood of light in on to his boy's heart. Reuben was the first who had told him that he was in love. One has, in chemistry, seen a glass-jar full

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of crystal clear liquid, clear as water, yet so saturated with some salt that the touch of any clumsy hand will send the spiculæ quivering through it in every direction, and prove to the sense of sight that the salt, but half-believed in before, is there in overpowering quantities. So Reuben's words crystallized Erne's love; and he denied it to himself no longer. And in this great gush of unutterable happiness poor Reuben's trouble and disgrace were only a mere incident, — a tragical incident, which would be a new bond in their love.

So Erne, leaving poor Reuben tinkering at the boats, walked on air. He had determined, as he walked through the wood, that the first thing he would do would be to go off to Chelsea, — to get Jim Burton, the blacksmith's eldest son (with whom you have already some acquaintance), and to tell him all about it; when, walking through the wood, he met his father.

"Have you been to see that young waterman, Erne?" said his father.

"I have," said Erne. "We ought to be kind to that fellow, dad. He is in trouble, and is innocent."

"I think he is," said Sir George. "I have a great fancy for that fellow. I know what is the matter with him."

"Do you?" said Erne. "I don't."

"Why, it 's about this Eliza Burton," said Sir George, looking straight at him; "that 's what is the matter."

"You don't happen to mean Emma Burton, do you?" said Erne.

"Emma or Eliza, or something of that sort," said Sir George. "He is in love with her, and she is playing the fool with some one else."

"He is not in love with her, and she has been playing the fool with nobody," said Erne.

"So you think," said Sir George; "I, however, happen to know the world, and from the familiarities which you have confessed to me as passing between this girl and yourself, I am of a different opinion. I have allowed you to choose what company you wished for above a year; I have been rewarded by your full confidence, and, from what you told me about this girl, I believe her to be an artful and dangerous young minx."

"Don't talk in that light way about your future daughter-in-law; I am going to marry that girl. I am seventeen, and in three years I shall marry her."

"How dare you talk such nonsense? Suppose, sir, that I was to alter —— I mean, to stop your allowance, sir, hey?"

"Then the most gentlemanly plan would be to give me notice. Her father will teach me his trade."

"You are impertinent, undutiful, and, what is worse, a fool ——"

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"And all that sort of thing," said Erne. "Having fired your broadside of five-and-forty sixty-eight pounders, perhaps you will let off your big swivel-gun on deck. I tell you I am going to marry Emma Burton."

"You know, you undutiful and wicked boy, all the consequences of a *mésalliance* ——"

"That's the big gun, hey?" said Erne. "Why, yes; your *mésalliance* with my mother having been dinned into my ears ever since I was five, as the happiest match ever made, I *do* know; you have put your foot in it there. A blacksmith's daughter is as good as a gamekeeper's, any day."

"Her relations, sir! Her relations!"

"My Uncle Bob, sir! My Uncle Bob!"

Old Compton the lawyer had warned Erne, on one previous occasion, against what he called "hard hitting." But Erne, as Reuben would have said, could never keep his tongue between his teeth. His Uncle Bob was a very sore subject. His Uncle Bob had not borne the rise in circumstances consequent on his sister becoming Lady Hillyar with that equanimity which is the characteristic of great minds. The instant he heard of the honor in store for him, he got drunk, and had remained so, with slight lucid intervals ever since, — a period of eighteen years. Having the constitution of a horse, and the temper of his sister, he had survived hitherto, and was quoted from one doctor to another as the most remarkable instance ever known of the habitual use of stimulants. They used to give clinical lectures on him, and at last made him uncommonly proud of his performances. Such, combined with a facility for incurring personal liabilities, which was by no means impaired by his intemperate habits, were some of the characteristics of Uncle Bob, now triumphantly thrown in Sir George's face by Erne.

He was very angry. He said that such an allusion as that, on Erne's part, revealed to him such an abyss of moral squalor beneath the surface as he was not prepared for in the case of one so young.

"Now, mark me, sir. Once for all. I do not oppose your fancy for this girl. I encourage it. You distinctly understand that once for all. Your brother dines here to-day."

"So I hear," said Erne, seeing it would not do to go on with any more nonsense.

"I hope sincerely that you and your brother will remain friends. I do not purpose your seeing much of him. His wife has, I hear, some claims to beauty."

"She is the sweetest little rosebud you ever saw in your life."

"Where have you seen her? I *know* you didn't go to seek them, because you promised me you would not."

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"I did not, indeed. I guessed who they were from a few words they said in church, and, as I came out, I introduced myself."

"Where were you? At what church?"

"At the old church, Chelsea."

"What a singular thing. Is Compton come?"

It was with intense eagerness that Mr. Compton, knowing what he knew, watched the face of father and son, when they met after so many years estrangement. He knew perfectly how much, how very much, each of them had to forgive the other; and he knew, moreover, that neither of them had the least intention of forgiveness. He guessed that George had come over to try to win back his father's good graces with the assistance of his wife; but he knew far too much to hope much from her assistance. One thing he knew, which others only guessed, that Sir George Hillyar had made a will, leaving Erne eight thousand a year. This was the paper, which (if your memory will carry you back so many months) he had exhibited such an anxiety to take to his office, but which Sir George insisted on keeping in his old escritoire.

He was in the library, and Sir George was out when he heard them drive up. He knew that there was no one to receive them, and saw from that that their reception was to be formal. He did not hurry at his dressing, for he was in some small hopes that George and his wife might have a short time, were it only a minute, together alone with Sir George, and that either of them might show some gleam of affection towards the other, which might bring on a better state of things than the cold, cruel course of formality which Sir George had evidently planned.

"It will be a bad job for Erne, possibly," said the old man. "But my young friend must take his chance. I won't stand between father and son, even for him."

When he came into the drawing-room he found Erne and his father dressed and waiting. They were standing together at the very end of the third drawing-room, before the fire, and Sir George was talking to Erne about one of the horses. When he joined them, a question was put to him on the subject; and they went on discussing it. There was not the smallest sign of anxiety or haste about Sir George's manner.

He had not been talking with Erne many minutes, when the door by which he had entered, which was at the very farthest end of the three rooms, was opened again; and Mr. and Mrs. George Hillyar came in, and began making their way through the vast archipelago of grand furniture which lay between the opposing parties. Sir George took out his watch, clicked it open, and told Erne to ring the bell and order dinner.

The three rooms were well lighted up, and, great as the dis-

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sociate with people so far below him in rank. I don't know why that young gentleman's father has shown such blind trust in him. It may be because he has such full and perfect confidence in him, or it may be that his great love for him has made him foolish. Whichever way it is, for that young gentleman to abuse his father's confidence so utterly as to go masquerading in a dress which he has no right to wear, in the lowest parts of the town, with two common lads, is a degree of meanness which I don't expect at all."

As she said this I saw Joe's magnificent, Byron-like head turned in anger upon her, and I saw a wild, indignant flush rise upon his face, and go reddening up to the roots of his close, curling hair; I saw it rise, and then I saw it die away, as Joe limped towards her, and kissed her. Whether she had *seen* it, or not, it was hard to say, but she had guessed it would be there: she put her arm round his neck, and then drew his face against hers, saying,

"Ask my brother Joe, here, what he thinks."

"He thinks as you do, and so do I," said Erne, quietly. "If you were always by me I should never do wrong."

"Ask Jim what he thinks about it," said Emma, laughing. "Ask that great stupid, dear old Jim, how he would like to see his noble hero, with a greasy old cap on, sucking oranges in the gallery of the theatre in the New Cut. Look how he stands there, like a stupid old ox. But I know who is the best of us four, nevertheless."

The "stupid old ox —" that is to say, the Honorable James Burton, who is now addressing you, — had thrown his leather apron over his left shoulder, and was scratching his head. I am afraid that I did look very like a stupid ox. But think that, if you had taken the cobwebs out of my brain, and wound them off on a card, you would have found that I was making a feeble effort to try to think that my brother and sister were two rather heroic and noble persons. After all, I only fancy that I remember that I was trying to think that I thought so. I am no fool, but that fierce flush on Joe's face had confused and frightened me. I saw very great danger. I had not seen that look there for a long time.

Erne gave up his project, and soon went away in the best of humors; Joe went to his school; and I was left alone with Emma.

Though I still had my apron over my shoulder, and might, for all I can remember, have still been scratching my head, yet still all the cobwebs in my brain were drawn out into one strong thread, stronger than silk, and I knew what to say and what to do. I turned on Emma.

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"You were perfectly right," I said, "in stopping him going. You were right in every word you said to *him;* but you had no right to speak of Joe and myself as you did."

She folded her hands, sweet saint, as if in prayer, and took it all so quietly.

"It was not good to speak of your brother so," I went on, with heightened voice and an angry face. "You may speak as you please of me but, if you speak in that way of Joe, before his face, you will raise the devil in him, and there will be mischief. You should measure your words. Let me never hear that sort of thing again."

I was right in every word I said to her. And yet I would give all my great wealth, my title, everything I have, except my wife and children, to unsay those words again. O, you who use hard words, however true they may be, when will you be persuaded that every hard, cold word you use is one stone on a great pyramid of useless remorse?

How did she answer me? She ran to me and nestled her noble head against my bosom, and called me her own sweet brother, and begged me not to scold her, for that she loved him, loved him, loved him. That Erne's name was written on her heart; but that he should never, never know it on this side of the grave; for she would devote herself to Joe, and be his sister and friend to death; and that she was so sorry for what she had said.

What could I do? What I did, I suppose. Soothe her, quiet her, and tell her I had been in the wrong (which was not altogether true). That is what I did, however; and so I had said the first and last harsh word to her. It cannot be recalled, but there is some comfort in thinking that it was the first and the last.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE GHOST SHOWS A LIGHT FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THE night we went to the play, it was arranged that Joe, because of his lameness, should start first; and I was to stay behind, to finish some work. It therefore happened that I found myself hurrying through the small streets beyond Westminster Bridge, alone.

I am going to relate a distressing accident, very shortly, for the simple reason that, if I had not witnessed it, I should have missed

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making a singular discovery and meeting with a few singular adventures.

I noticed a young man, of my own rank and age, riding a cart-horse just in front of me, and took but little notice of him; not dreaming how very important his every look would be, in a very few minutes. I remembered after, that he seemed a merry, good-humored fellow, and was whistling. The night was frosty, and the road was slippery; his horse blundered and stumbled, and threw him, whistling as he was, under the wheels of a passing wagon. The next moment I was carrying him on to a door-step, quite dead; shattered beyond recognition.

I cannot tell you what a lamentable affair it was. I did what I could, — I helped others, and was beginning to congratulate myself upon my self-possession, when I found that a very singu lar effect was produced on myself. I was giving my name and address to a policeman, when I felt something coming too quickly to be stopped, and burst into a wild tempest of tears, — such a tempest that I could not stay the course of it for a time, but had to give it way, gust after gust, until they grew fainter, and died away into an occasional stormy sob. Then I went on to the theatre, thinking, poor fool as I was, that I might forget the real terrible tragedy I had just witnessed by throwing myself headlong into a sea of fantastic balderdash.

I found Joe, and, when the door was opened, we fought our way into a good place. The instant we got settled, Joe asked me what was the matter, and I told him that I had seen a fellow run over. He said, "Poor chap!" but, not having seen it happen, thought no more about it, but settled himself down to enjoy his evening.

I suppose there are some play-goers still alive who remember the "Harvest Home." It belongs to the Eocene, or at latest to the early Miocene, formation of plays, — probably, to be correct, it is half-way between the "Stranger" and the "Colleen Bawn." There was a dawning of the "sensation" style in it, but nothing very tremendous. O. Smith shot the first comedy gentleman stone-dead (as you were supposed to suppose, if you had n't known better all the time) from behind a stone wall, with an air-gun; and the first lady threw herself on the corpse, and was dragged off screaming, in a snow-storm, by Mr. O. Smith, her putative papa. Whereupon, Mr. Wright came on, as a Cockney sportsman dressed like a Highlander, having lost his way, and, as far as I can remember, found the body. In the end, Mr. O. Smith was hung, or, on the principle, says Joe, of "Nec coram populo," was led off cursing and kicking; and Mr. Wright was married (or was going to be) to the second lady.

That was the sort of stuff that Joe and I used to laugh and

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cry over in those days. We had seen the play acted at the Adelphi, and were most anxious to compare the magnificent Milesian Irish pronunciation of our own Miss Brady, with the broken English of Madame Celeste. It all fell dead on me that night. Even poor old Wright, with his bare legs and his impudent chatter, could not make me laugh. The image of what I had carried up and set on the door-step, an hour before, would not leave me. That a merry, harmless lad like that should be struck down in an instant, seemed to me so lamentable and cruel. I could think of nothing else. The details would come before me so persistently, — the head that would hang; the two low, fallen women, who kept saying, "Poor dear! poor dear lad!" and all the rest of it. The play seemed such a hideous silly mockery after what had happened that I could bear no more of it. I made some excuse to Joe, and I went out.

The squalor and noise of the street suited my mood better than the gaudy brightness of the play-house: and the bustling reality of the crowd soothed me for a time, and made me forget the tragedy of the evening. This crowd of noisy, swarming, ill-fed, ill-taught, ill-housed poor folks was, after all, composed of my own people, — of men, women, and lads of my own rank in life; of people whose language was my own, whose every want and care I was acquainted with; of the people among whom I had been bred up, and whom I had learnt to love. I was at home among them.

The other day, after spending years in a higher and purer atmosphere, I went among them again, just to see whether they were the same to me as in old times. I found that I was quite unchanged. They did not disgust me in the least. I felt, when I got among them again, that I was at home once more. I was pleased to find that I had not developed into a snob; but I was sorry to find that they distrusted me, in my good clothes, and would have none of me. Knowing them as I did, and knowing how they talked among themselves, I could see that they talked in a different language in the presence of my fine clothes and watch-chain. It is very hard for a gentleman to know them; very nearly impossible. They never speak to him quite naturally.

I went into a public-house, where I heard music, and got myself some porter, and sat down on a bench among some young men, who made room for me. The musicians played some dance-music, — a waltz, which I now know to be one of Strauss's; but it sounded to me like the lapping of the tide upon the mud-banks, and the moaning of the wind from the river among the gravestones in the old church-yard.

So, thought-driven, with a despondency on me for which it was difficult to account, I was compelled homewards. From street to street, all low and dull, to the bridge, where the chill, frosty wind

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rustled among the scaffolding of the new Houses of Parliament with ghostly sighs. And so I passed westward, through another labyrinth of squalid streets; some bright with flaming gas and swarming with noisy crowds; some dark and dull, with only a few figures here and there, some of which lurked away before the heavy tramp of the policeman.

As I passed the vast dark façade of Chelsea Hospital the clock struck ten, and a few minutes afterwards I came on the broad desolate river, at the east end of Cheyne Walk. The frosty wind was moaning among the trees, and the desolate wild river was lapping and swirling against the heads of the barges and among the guard-piles, which stood like sentries far out, stemming the ebbing tide. Of all scenes of desolation which I ever witnessed, give me the Thames at night. I hurried on again, with the strange terrified humor on me stronger than ever.

There was a ball at a large bow-windowed house, close to Don Saltero's, and I stopped to listen to the music. There were some fiddles and a piano, played evidently by skilled professional hands. Good heavens! could they play nothing but that wild waltz of Strauss's, which I had heard the Germans playing in the public-house? Why should handsome young gentlemen and beautiful girls dance to a tune which sweeps in such strange, melancholy eddies of sound, that even now it sets me thinking of the winds which wander over solitary moonless seas, which break with a far-heard moan, against distant capes, in an unknown land at midnight?

A couple came from the rest and stood in the window together, behind the half-drawn curtains: and I could see them, for their heads were against the light. He was a gallant youth, with a square head; and she seemed beautiful too. He spoke eagerly to her, but she never looked towards him; he seemed to speak more eagerly yet, and tried to take her hand; but she withdrew it, and he slowly left her and went back into the room; but she remained, and I saw her pulling the flowers from her nosegay and petulantly throwing them on the carpet, while she looked out steadily across the wild sweeping river, hurrying to the sea.

So on I went again, passing swiftly through the church-yard. In a few moments after, I had turned out of Church Street into our own row. It was quite quiet. Our great house rose like a black wall in front of me; I cast my eye up it until it rested on the great dormer-window of Reuben's room, — the ghost's room, — and, good heavens! there was a light there.

It was gone while I looked at it; but there was no doubt about it. Either Reuben had come home, or else it was the ghost. I went in at once. My father was sitting alone in the kitchen, with his head in his hands; I looked up at a certain hook over

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the dresser. The key of Reuben's room was hanging there still.

My father looked up. "Jim, my old chap," he said, "I 'm so glad you 're come. Get my pipe, and come and sit alongside. How did you like the theayter, old man?"

As I looked at my father, I saw something was the matter. I had never seen the dear, noble face in sorrow before; but my love told me at once that sorrow had come. I waited for him to tell me what it was, I had perfect confidence in him. I said (in the old style, for though I had been trying hard to talk like Joe and Erne, I had hitherto made a mess of it, and always resorted to the vernacular in emergencies, or for business purposes), "I did n't care about the play to-night. I saw a young chap run over, and that upset me for the evening. I was n't going to spoil Joe's fun; so I came home" ("took and hooked it" in the original). "Reuben is not come back, is he?"

"No," said my father; "he ain't come back. What should he be come back for? There 's his key a-hanging over the dresser. I say, old man, Mr. Compton 's been here?"

"Has anything gone wrong about the patent?" I asked, aghast.

"Not *gone*, old man, but very likely to go, I 'm afeard."

"How is that?" I asked.

"The invention was anticipated, Mr. Compton is afraid. There was a patent taken out for it before, and Mr. Compton is afraid that Marks and Cohen have bought the patentee's interest in it; in which case, my chance ain't worth a brass farden."

"And what then?" I asked.

"Why, I 'm ruined, old boy, body and bones. The savings of twenty happy years gone in a day. And worse than that, — nigh a couple of hundred more, as far as I can make out. I would n't have cared — I would n't have cared," said my father, hurling his pipe fiercely into the fireplace; "I tell you, Jim, I would n't have cared — " he said, once more, with a heave of his great chest and a sob. That was all he said, but I understood him.

I rose to the situation. One of the proudest recollections of my most prosperous and lucky career is the way I rose to the situation that unhappy night. I put my arm on his shoulder, and drew his grizzled head to me, and said: —

"Would n't have cared — if it had n't been for what, father?"

"I would n't have cared," said my father, "if the disgrace had fallen on me alone."

"Has any one been a-talking about disgrace?" I asked.

"Not yet," said my father.

"They 'd better not," I answered. "Let 'em come to me and talk about disgrace. I 'll disgrace 'em. And ruin, — who talks of ruin? How can the best smith in England be ruined; they

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can't take his trade from him, can they? Let 's up with everything, and go to Australey."

"What?" said my father, looking up.

"Go to Australey," I said, as bold as brass; "the country as Master Erne's brother came from. Why, a smith is a gentleman there. He 's —"

"Go to bed, old chap," said my father.

"Bed or no bed," I said, "is neither the one thing nor the other. According as a chap thinks, so will he speak; that is, if he acts according, which is reason. My sentiments being asked, I gives 'em free; and there you are, and welcome, with many more, and thank you kindly; and may the Lord forgive us all our transgressions." (All this was said with defiant assertion; for I saw that, by the mere mention of the word Australia, I had brought a light in my father's face which was not there before. In my nervous eagerness to drive the nail home, I made the above little speech, which might have been intended to mean something then, but the key to which is missing now.)

"Take and go to bed, I tell you," said my father again; "you and your Australeys! I 'm ashamed on you."

"Shame took and whispered in his ear," I answered, seeing I was somehow doing the right thing, "and Old Adam and Little Faith tried to stop his going on, too, whereas I speaks out, and ain't for stopping nobody."

My father, possibly concluding that the more I spoke the more I should involve myself, reiterated: —

"Go to bed, I tell you, old chap; who knows but what you 're talking sense? I don't say neither the one thing nor the other; all I say is, go to bed."

And so I went: to bed, and to sleep. And, after some unknown time of unconsciousness, I awoke with a ghastly horror upon me.

Joe was by my side, but I did not wake him. I was very careful not to do that, and there were one or two reasons for it.

First of all, I saw the poor lad run over again — that pale face, those teeth, and those spasmodically winking eyelids; and, while he was still in my arms, I came round the corner once more, into the buildings, and saw the ghost's light gleam out of Reuben's window. And then Reuben was come home, and in trouble up there. And then it was Reuben who had been run over, and then Reuben had to sit up there all alone, poor lad, watching the body; but, however the phantasmagories shifted themselves, the crowning horror of all was in the room up stairs, where I had seen the light. And in the sheer desperation of terror I rose to go there, refusing to awaken Joe, because I even then, light-headed as I was, remembered that Reuben would not have him know anything.

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And so, in a state of cowardly horror at I knew not what — a state of mind which was nearly allied to the most desperate courage — I arose silently, and, in my trousers and shirt only, passed out of our room on to the great empty staircase, determined to go up all through the desolate empty house, until I found out the mystery which I knew was hid aloft in the ghostly attic. I would penetrate into the mystery of that strange light, even though I died of terror.

The old staircase creaked under my weight, and the web-winged things which flutter about the ceilings of these sort of places dashed round aloft in silent wheeling flight. The ghosts all passed on before me in a body; and I was glad of it, for I was afraid that some of them might stand politely aside in a corner to let me pass, and I don't think I could have stood that. Yet all the ghosts passed on, except a solitary one, who followed stealthily.

This following ghost was the most terrible ghost of all, for I could n't see what it was going to be at. I thought at one time that I would stop and see whether it would stop too; but then again, I reflected, what a terrible thing it would be if it didn't, but came right on.

Once in my terror I thought of crying for help, and raising the neighborhood, but while I was thinking of it I passed a staircase-window, and saw that I was already high above the neighbors' highest chimneys, and that I might shout long enough. There was no retreat now without passing by the ghost, which was following; and every step I took I felt a growing dislike to do that — without the kitchen poker.

For it was a clumsy ghost, and knew its business but imperfectly. No properly educated ghost would knock a hard metallic substance against the banisters and then use a most low and vulgar expletive immediately afterwards. I was getting wonderfully uneasy about this ghost. The poker was such a handy little poker; but here was I, and there was the poker, and so there was nothing to do but to go on.

At last I reached Reuben's room-door, and got hold of the handle. The door was unlocked; and I threw it open, to see nothing but blank darkness.

I held my breath, and *felt* that some one was there. Dreading the man who was behind me, I desperately sprang forward towards the well-known fireplace to get hold of *Reuben's* poker, if I should have the luck. Then a lanthorn was turned full blaze on my face. I sprang towards it, with the intention of getting hold of the man who held it, putting it out, getting possession of it, and pounding everything human I met with black and blue, on the old cockney rule that "a solitary man is worth a dozen in

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the dark, because he can hit everybody, and everybody else is afraid of hitting one another"; but, before I could reach him, I had a cloth thrown over my head, an arm round my throat, tightening every moment, and in less than a minute was completely overpowered, with my arms tied behind me, blindfolded, with a handkerchief passed through my mouth, and tied behind, having seen no one.

I felt that I was in the light, and that people were looking at me; at last some one spoke, in a very gentlemanly, refined voice I thought, and said, "Who the deuse is it?"

"It's the young smith; it's that gallows young Burton," said another voice I knew too terribly well. It was the voice of the man I have called Bill Sykes.

Another voice said, "Let us beat the dog's brains out, and cut his body into small pieces and burn it. Curse him; prying into three gentlemen's private affairs like this. Let me have his blood, Bill. Let me have hold of him."

I knew this voice well enough. It was Mr. Pistol's. I was n't much afraid of *him*. It was Sykes I was afraid of, the man who had me by the collar; the more so, because I saw, by poor Pistol's asking to get hold of me, that he wanted to get me out of Sykes's hands; and the more so still, because I knew that Pistol, in his terror of Sykes, would let *anything* happen. Therefore, when Sykes said to Pistol, "Stand back and lock the door," and when I felt his hand tighten on my collar, I began to say the Lord's Prayer as fast as ever I could.

Pistol only said, "Bill, hold hard"; but his feeble protest was drowned in the strangest sound I ever heard. The unknown man with the gentlemanly voice broke out with a fierce, snapping, snarling objurgation, which took myself and another listener utterly by surprise.

"Sykes, you blood-thirsty, clumsy hound, drop that life-preserver or you are a dead man. It is only by the cowardly idiocy of that fellow Pistol there that you are in this thing at all, you low brute, — the best thing you were ever in in your life, worth five hundred of your stupid burglaries. Leave that boy alone, you worthless dog."

I felt Sykes's hand relax, but the bully did not yield.

"You showing fight, you sneaking, long-nosed cur! Shut up, or I'll pound you into a jelly."

"Will you?" said the gentlemanly man, almost in a scream of rage. "Me! you dog. Me! with this knife in my hand. You ignorant idiot, with your clumsy cudgels. Learn the use of this, and then you'll be my equal; just as sure as I'm your master. You'd better go and tickle a black snake on the nose in December than come near me with this in my hand. Leave that lad alone. I won't have a hair of his head touched."

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The bully knew the fearful advantage which the use of the knife gives, too well; he came down a little. He said only:

"What for?"

"Because I choose it. How could such as you understand if I told you why?" said the gentlemanly man, with a fiercer snarl than ever. "I am a rogue of long standing, but I have seen better things, you Sykes. I hate you and your class. Hell has begun with me in this world, with all its torment and its loathing; and the most terrible part of my torment is, that those I loved faithfully have cast me off, and that I have to herd with such hounds as you. But I will be revenged on one, until I bring him to reason; and while I carry a knife, I will express my loathing and scorn for such curs as you. Come hither, lad. Do you care for your cousin Reuben?"

As he said this he moved the handkerchief from my mouth, and I answered, "Yes, I cared very much for my cousin."

"We are a parcel of thieves and worse, my lad, who have got possession of the room he rents. He knows us, my boy, and has been seen in our company. If you say one word about to-night's work, your cousin Reuben will be transported as an accomplice of ours. So you see how fatal the consequences of your speaking would be. We shall be gone to-morrow, may be. You'd best say nothing, for your cousin's sake."

I said that I would not say one word.

"If you do," said Pistol, "I'll have your bingy; strike me as blind as a morepork if I don't have your bingy!" (by which speech I know, through the light of later experience, that Mr. Pistol had been transported).

"Shut up, fool," said the gentlemanly man. "Sykes, I am going to let this young 'un go."

"I'll cut his throat if he blows," said blustering Bill. "*He* knows *me*. He knows he'll never be safe if he does. Swear him. Do you wish you may die if you peach, you cursed young toad?"

"You clumsy fool," said the gentlemanly man; "put him on his honor, I tell you. You'll have his monkey up directly. You're not going to say a word, for your cousin's sake; are you, Jim?"

I repeated that I would not say one single word.

"Then come outside here," said the gentlemanly man. And so he led me to the door, pulled the cloth from my eyes, shut me out on the landing, and locked the door after. When I found myself free on the landing, I am pleased to remember that the first thing I did was to offer up a short thanksgiving: that it was only the grace after meat which I repeated in my haste is no matter, — the intention was the same.

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Now the steed was stolen I shut the stable-door, and went down stairs with the most elaborate caution, in anticipation of another ambuscade. I was a long time in reaching my bedroom. At last I reached it. One of the pleasantest moments in my life was when I slipped into bed, and heard my father and mother snoring in the next room, producing between them such a perfect imitation of a rusty mine-pump, as would have made their fortunes on the "boards."

One comfort was that Joe had not missed me. He was lying just as I left him. He had evidently been fast asleep all the time.

Had he? The moment I was comfortably settled he spoke. He said, "It was touch and go for that devil Sykes, old Jim."

"What do you mean, Joe?" I asked, in my astonishment.

"Mean!" said Joe, laughing; "why, that I was standing in the dark behind him with our bedroom poker, and if he had raised his hand six inches higher, I 'd have had him down like a dead dog, and Pistol after him. He 'd have gone down at once, if I had n't seen the knife in the other one's hand. When *he* turned up trumps, I let things be."

"Then it was *you* who followed me up stairs?"

"So it was, Jim. I 've had my suspicions about that room; and, when you began to cry out in your sleep about Reuben watching corpses up there, and when you got out and went up, I followed you. I thought you were sleep-walking, and so did n't dare to wake you. I 've followed you into many fights, my old boy, and I was n't going to let you go up *there* alone."

"I think you would follow me to death, Joe."

"I think I would," he said. "They had nothing but one dark-lanthorn, or I should have had to play the dickens. I wonder what they are doing there? I think they are only hiding. We must speak to Rube, poor lad. It is very hard on him. Poor, faithful, affectionate fellow! I wish he had more determination; I wish he could say No. But what can he do?"

"I 'll tell you what," I said. "I have a suspicion. I believe that the man who came to my assistance with his knife was the same man I saw in Lawrence Street, that I told you of, when Rube was among the whole gang."

Joe rose up in bed, and said, in accents of profound astonishment, "Why, do you mean to say you don't see how things stand!"

I said, "No; but that long-nosed fellow seemed to have some kind of influence with Rube."

"Do you mean to say," said Joe, "that you have n't made out this much: That hook-nosed man is Reuben's father, our cousin, Samuel Burton, come home from his transportation, having fol-

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lowed, as I strongly suspect, Mr. George Hillyar? Did n't you make *that* out?"

I was too much dumb-foundered to speak.

"You old stupid, you old hammersmith. *I* thought you had made it all out, and would speak even to me, Reuben having distrusted me. I have watched the man days and days, till I made it out. Don't you see how doubly it tongue-ties you and me, the only two who know it?"

I did see that, certainly. But at this moment my father dreamt of the devil, and had to be punched awake by my mother, lest he should pass into that fourth and dangerous state of mesmeric coma, as did the young lady spoken of by that acute scientific reasoner, Dr. G——. In which case, as every one ought to know, it would have become neccssary to mesmerise some one else, nineteen to the dozen, to fetch him back again, before he got into the fifth state, which is the deuse and all. At all events, my father awoke, and accused my mother on the spot of having had the nightmare, in consequence of having taken too much vinegar with her trotters at supper: which was all she got for her pains. But, he being awake, Joe and I talked no more.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AFFAIRS AT STANLAKE.

Gerty did n't like England; she could n't possibly conceive why the people in England did n't all go and live in Australia. James wanted to get as many of them as would come, over to Cooksland free of expense, and when they came they always liked it, — in the end, you would understand her to mean; for at first they felt strange, and were, Lord bless you, more particular over their rations than any corn-stalk cockatoo who might have treed his section on the burst, and come back to the shed: or than any real stringy back hand ever thought of being. She did n't see why they should not all move over together. It would n't do to leave the Queen behind; but she might get to think better of it as soon as she saw how much superior Australia was to England. And so she used to twitter on to old Sir George Hillyar, never allowing for the fact that, when most confidential and affectionate with him, she was apt (as above) to ramble off into fields of utterly incomprehensible slang, and to

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leave his close-cropped gray hair standing on end with amazement.

Gerty did n't like Stanlake. "Not very much, papa," she would say to Sir George, taking his hand in hers; "you ain't offended, are you? because I must n't offend you, or else James will be angry with me when I go back home, and say it is all my fault. I love you, but I don't like Stanlake. George knows you are going to leave it to him, because Mr. Compton advised him to cut down the east belt. But I don't like it. It 's so cold to your bones."

"What do you like, my dear little white rosebud?" Sir George said one day, laughing.

"Why," she answered, "let me see. I like you (very much indeed, — you don't know how much); and I like George more than you; and I like Erne more than you, but not so much as George. And I like Reuben the waterman, and his cousin the blacksmith, Jim, — I mean, you know, Erne's friend, — the tall lad with the large brown eyes, who sat under the tomb that first Sunday when the pew-opener poked the umbrella into her husband's eye, because the mad woman caught spiders in her prayers (you did n't hear of that, though). I like him, and I like his great big sister; for, although her hands are very red, she has a gentle face, and her voice is like James's when he is playing with baby. I like all these; so I can't be so hard to please as you want to make out, you cruel tyrant."

"I don't mean what people do you like," said Sir George, gently, "for I believe you love every one you come near, just as every one loves you. I mean, what do you like to do best? What can I do to amuse you, to make the time go less slowly?"

"I like the fire best," said Gerty. "I like to sit before the fire, and look at the coals."

"Why?"

"It warms my poor bones," said Gerty. "And I see things there."

"Tell me what Gerty, — tell me what. Do you ever see a a little white sea-swallow that has winged its way, such a weary way, over the heaving sea to sing to an old man and soften his heart?"

"No," said Gerty, simply, "I don't ever remember to have seen that. I see black fellows, and ships, and balls, and things of that kind. I saw the quartz range beyond Neville's-Gap once yesterday, where we go to get flowers. My word, what a rage poor mamma was in!"

"About what?" asked Sir George, much amused. "About the ships, or the black fellows?"

"About my book-muslin frock, you foolish thing, and my com-

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plexion; there was n't a bit of it as big as your hand that was n't torn. And there *were* black fellows in this story, too, — for, when I found I was bushed, I had to go and look after them to take me home; and I followed the cattle-tracks till I came to the great Billebong where they were fishing, and I made them up stick and take me home. Lord! you should have seen me coming in state over the paddock with my hair down, and five-and-forty black fellows, lobros, picanninies and all, at my heels. You would have laughed."

"I think I should," said Sir George.

"Mamma did 'nt," said Gerty. "I was as brown as you; and that book-muslin cost a deal of money. She made such a fuss about it before the black fellows, that they went back and tracked me to the Grevillea Scrub, to get the shreds of it which were left on the thorns, thinking they were some priceless tissue. They kept bringing pieces of it as long as your little finger, or smaller, to my mother ever so long, and wanting her to give them brandy and tobacco for them. She *was* angry."

"She must have had good cause, with six daughters like you to take care of."

"Yes. You see she had staked her reputation that we should marry better than the seven Brown girls. And what with poor papa going off at the Prince of Wales, with the gout getting into his stomach, and tallow down to three-pence, and all the hands on the burst at once, it was enough to make her anxious, was n't it?"

"*I* should think so," Sir George would reply. And then she would go chirrupping on again; and George would sit watching them from behind his book.

There was no doubt whatever that silly Gerty was making extraordinary way with the old man. Her amazing beauty, her gentleness, and her simplicity won the old man completely; while her piquant conversation as above (it was piquant enough from her mouth, though it may be dull from this pen), amused him immensely. Whenever she was utterly, unintelligibly, colonial in her language, Sir George would make her explain herself, and this would cause her to use other colonialisms worse than the first, to his intense delight. She was winning on the old man day by day, and George saw it with hope.

The old man would sit hours with her now. They neither bored the other. Gerty loved talking, and he loved listening to her strange prattle. Sir George grew sensibly more free with and kind to his son; and the odd eight thousand a year, — which Secretary Oxton had encouraged him to go to London and seek, — seemed nearer to realization day by day. Old Compton, the lawyer, used to come often, as his wont was; and, as he saw Sir George and Gerty together so much, he took the trouble to watch

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them, and as he watched them he said, "A new will! — a new will! My young friend Erne will not be so rich as I thought."

George watched them too, with hope, — hope sometimes alternated with despair. Sir George would be sitting beside Gerty absorbed in a kind of pitying admiration of her for an hour or more, when in would come Erne, who loved his sister-in-law, and loved to hear her talk in her strange *naïve* way, and would stand against his father's chair on the other side. And then George would see the old man's right hand withdrawn from the arm of Gerty's chair, and his left go wandering up to smooth down the clustering brown curls, which hung on Erne's head like a garland.

Then George would set his teeth and curse Erne silently in his heart, for his hatred of him grew stronger day by day. He *knew* that Erne was utterly simple and undesigning; that he loved Gerty, — nay, that he loved *him*, George himself; but he would not know it. He fed his heart in secret denunciations of his brother. He let the devil in; and, to himself and in private, he cursed his brother for a designing young villain, knowing that he was lying all the time. The story of Cain and Abel is a very old one. Where were James and Aggy now?

People called on Gerty. The Nalders called; but Gerty was looking out of window, and saw them as they drove up, and was n't at home. She would die sooner than be at home when that artful bold Yankee woman had the audacity to call and hunt up her husband, — much sooner die, for then they would be sorry for her, and would not despise her. She had *some* spirit left, she thanked Heaven, though the cold *had* got into her bones. Nevertheless, she looked from behind the curtain as they drove away, and saw that Mrs. Nalder had been dressed by a Frenchwoman, and looked horridly handsome and amiable; and that Nalder had mounted a tall white hat on to his honest head, and wore what he would have called a white vest and black pants, although it was only half-past two in the afternoon.

Then, another time, some other horrid people called. She could n't see who they were, but was sure they were horrid and she was n't at home. But she heard a loud voice in the hall say, "Sure, then, Phayley, we 'll wait in the parlor till she come"; and then, with a little cry of joy, she ran out of the drawing-room, and the next moment had buried her lovely head in the capacious bosom of Miss Lesbia Burke.

The good Irishwoman half laughed and half cried over her; at one time holding her at arm's length to get a good look at her, and the next hugging her again, like a dear old lunatic as she was; while Mr. Phelim O'Brien (the leader of the Opposition, James Oxton's deadly enemy) stood looking on, with a smile of

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infinite contentment on his handsome face. It appeared that he and his cousin, Miss Burke, were to be in London for some time on "bhisnuss," and they could meet again often. Lesbia brought all kinds of tender loves from half the colony; and, more, it was this battered old Irishwoman who had gone out of her way to Neville's Gap, that she might visit the quartz ranges, and bring Gerty a great nosegay of wild flowers; and here they were in a bandbox, triumphantly. They were all withered and dead, — no more like their former selves, than was Lesbia Burke to the beauty of thirty years before: but some of the aromatic ones kept their scent still, — the dear old bush scent, — speaking of peaceful sunny summer days among the hot silent forests: and Lesbia's heart was as true and as loving now as it was when she learnt her first prayer at her mother's knee.

Gerty did not chirrup much to Sir George that night, but sat back in her easy-chair, with the faded flowers on her lap, tying them up into various bunches like a child, and sometimes untying them and altering them. Once she looked up and asked him whether he did not wonder why she was doing this, and he said "Yes."

"I am calling up the different holidays I have had, and am making up a boquet for each one, of the flowers I remember best on those days, in order that you and George may put them in my coffin. I should like this bunch of silver wattle to lie on my heart, because they grow thick in the paddocks at Barker's Station, where George came and made love to me."

"You must not talk about coffins, my love," said Sir George. "Try cradles, hey? that is more to the purpose."

"It may be either," said Gerty, rising wearily. "I think I will go to bed. I think you had better send for Aggy; she is at the Bend. She will be here in an hour. I wish you could send for her."

Then the poor little woman looked wildly round the room and saw where she was; and, as she realized the fact that her sister was sixteen thousand miles away, she gave a weary little moan, which went to Sir George's heart.

"She is too far to send for, my love," he said, kindly. "I wish she were here."

"Stay," said Gerty. "Tell me, dear old papa, was Lesbia Burke here to-day, or am I dreaming again? I know she was. These are the flowers she brought me. George! George! send for old Lesbia!"

Lesbia Burke was sent for, and we need not insult your judgment by telling you that she came raging off instantly to the assistance of the sweet little bush flower. She was naturally a loud woman, and was rather louder than usual on her journey in

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consequence of her impatience. But the moment she entered Stanlake doors, she, with the wonderful adaptive power of her nation, became transformed into a calm, dexterous, matronly lady, with a commanding power expressed in every word and attitude. She took possession of the house and ruled it. Sir George Hillyar had an eye for female beauty, but he told George that he had never seen anything like Lesbia Burke's poses before. When she swept into the library, at two o'clock in the morning, with the lighted candle close against her stern-marked face, and announced the event to them, both of them started. "The Siddons, as Lady Macbeth, would have hidden her head," said Sir George. She certainly was a terribly beautiful woman.

It was she who put the baby into bed with Gerty when the doctor gave leave, and who, when she heard Gerty's strange little croon of delighted wonder, fell on the astonished doctor and baronet's neck, and called him an "ould darlin'."

"Good heavens!" said the precise old gentleman; "I hope no one saw her. What would Lady Savine say? You never know what these Irish people will be at next."

CHAPTER XXIX.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE BEGINNING OF THE BAD TIMES.

"THE Simultaneity of certain Crises in Human Thought, more especially relating to the Results of Investigation into Mechanical Agents," would form a capital title for a book, as yet to be written. As good a title as could be found (if you don't mind a little American, and follow Sir Walter Scott's doctrine about the title of books), because no one could by any possibility gather from it what the deuse the book was about, until they had read it.

The writer of this book would have to take notice that, for the last hundred years (say), intelligence has been so rapidly circulated, that the foremost thinkers in all civilized countries are at work for the same end at one and the same time. He would have to point out as examples (I merely sketch his work out for him) the simultaneous invention of steamboats on the Clyde and in New York; the nearly simultaneous invention of the Electric Telegraph in England and in America (though Cook and Wheatstone were clicking messages to Camden Town three months before the Yankees got to work). Again, for instance, the discovery of the planet Neptune, by Adams and Leverrier;

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and last, not least, the synchronic invention of the centrifugal bucket-lifter for emptying cesspools, — claims for which were sent in at the same time by Ebenezer Armstrong, of Salford, and by James Burton, of Church Place, Chelsea.

What actually ruined us was, that none of us would go near the machine after it was made, and that it had to be worked by third parties. In his enthusiasm for science, I believe that my father would have gone and superintended, but his proposition was met by flat rebellion of the whole family. My father demanded whether or no he was master in his own house; whereto Emma, who had a vast deal of spirit at times, replied promptly, "No, don't let him think so. Nothing of the kind." Emma's having turned Turk, startled my father, and caused him to reconsider the matter of his being master in his own house in another, and, let us hope, a better spirit; for he only sat down and troubled me for his pipe. When he had nearly smoked it, he caught my eye, and said, "There was three or four keys wanted driving home, old chap; and a washer or two on the upper spindle would have broke no one's bones. Nevertheless, let be; she is right in general. It 'll all be the same one day."

That night in the dark, Joe, who was at home, turned towards me and said, —

"Jim, Erne Hillyar is making fine gentlemen and ladies of us. We ought n't to have stopped his going to see the machine at work. I ought to have gone, and you ought to have gone also. We are getting too fine, Jim; it won't do."

I quite agreed, now I had time to think, and we determined to go the very next night.

But the very next day came Erne, looking so wonderfully handsome and so exquisitely clean, that going to Augusta Court to superintend the emptying of a cesspool became absolutely impossible. Certainly, what Joe said was true; Erne was making fine gentlemen of us.

That night the gentlemen who had charge of the machine came home and reported it broken. It had to be repaired. To satisfy curiosity, it was what gold-miners call a California pump (which is an old Chinese invention), but with hollow paddles, nearly like buckets. We had not repaired it for three weeks, and, by the time we had got it to work again, Armstrong had sent in his claim, and we had the satisfaction of knowing that the delay was entirely our own fault.

Strange to say, the invention had been registered some years, though, from want of practical knowledge, the machine had never been used. The former patentee instituted legal proceedings against my father and Armstrong. Cohen and Marks, the solicitors, bought up Armstrong, and we were nearly ruined.

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So ends the history of my father's inventions. The other day my mother asked him whether he could n't contrive a spring to prevent the front door slamming. He declined pointedly, saying that he had had enough of that in his life, and that she ought to be ashamed of herself for talking about such things.

Nearly ruined. All my father's savings, all Joe's little earnings, and most of the furniture, just saved us. We could keep the house over our heads, for we had taken it by the year, and my father and I had our trade and our strength between us and ruin still. And, as is very often the case, troubles did not come singly. There was another forge established at the bottom of Church Street, and our business grew a little slack (for new brooms sweep clean). We knew that a reaction in our favor would set in soon; but, meanwhile, our capital was gone, and we had to depend on our ready-money receipts for the men's wages.

Those men's wages were a terrible trouble. I have had a peaceful, prosperous life, and have been far better used than I deserve; for the trouble about these men's wages is the worst trouble, save the great disaster of my life, which I have ever known. I had always been a great favorite with them, and used to skylark and chaff with them; but that soon was altered when the curse of poverty came upon us. I was so terribly afraid of offending them. Their wages must be paid on Saturday, or they would go to the other forge. *We* had often to give trust, but we could never take trust from them. They had each eighteen shillings a week — two pounds fourteen; and one week we only took took three pounds seven in cash. There was not a stick of furniture, or a watch, or a spoon left which could go.

Then began the time of short meals. There were no more "jints" now. The "kag-mag and skewer-pieces," &c., contemptuously mentioned by my father to Mr. Compton, were now luxuries, — luxuries which were not indulged in every day by any means. The first necessity was bread and butter for the "kids," as our merry Reuben, absent through all of it, used to call them; the supply of that article and of milk-and-water was kept up to the last.

If the contemplation of a family who triumphantly come out strong, in the middle of a complication of troubles and difficulties, is pleasing to any of my readers, I should like him to have seen the Burton family in *their* troubles. It would have done his honest heart good to have seen the way in which we came out, when we had n't really, for three weeks, enough, or near enough, to eat.

My mother took to singing about her work. She could n't sing a bit. She never could and never will; but she took to it for all that. Some people take to playing the flute who can't play it at all, and therefore there is no reason why my mother should n't

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take to singing. At all events, she did, with an ostentatious light-heartedness which we could all see through. It would have been better if she had known any tune; but she did n't, and so we had to do without. Her singing, however, was better than some very fine singing indeed, for it produced the effect intended; it showed us all that she was determined to act as pitch-pipe in the family choir.

And we took up the harmony with a will, I warrant you. We had always been an easy-going, gentle sort of family; but now our benevolence began to take an active form to one another, which was painful then, and is painful now when I look back on it. Our love for one another had before this run on in a gentle, even stream; now it had got on the rapids and become passionate; for the same unwhispered terror was in all our hearts, — the terror lest, in the troubles and evils which were coming thick upon us, we might break up the old family bond and learn to care for one another less, — the ghastly doubt as to whether or no our love would stand the test of poverty.

Would it have outlived a year's disgraceful weary want, or would it not? That is a terrible question. Our troubles came so hard and fast, that *that* test was never applied to us. The only effect our troubles had on us was to knit us the closer together; to turn what had been mere ox-like contentment in one another's society into a heroic devotion, — a devotion which would have defied death. And the one person who led us through our troubles, — the one person who gave the key-note to our family symphony, and prevented one jarring note from being heard, — the person who turned out to be most cheerful, most patient, most gentle, most shifty, and most wise of all us, — was no other than my awkward, tall, hard-featured, square-headed, stupid old mother.

Fools would have called her a fool. I think that, in the times of our prosperity, we older children had got a dim notion into our heads that mother was not quite so wise as we were. Three weeks of misfortune cured us of that opinion, for ever and ever. That she was the most affectionate and big-hearted of women we had always known, but we never knew what a wonderful head she had till this time. When that great and somewhat sluggish brain got roused into activity by misfortune, we were almost awed by her calm, gentle wisdom. When better times came again, that brain grew sluggish once more; my mother's eyes assumed their old calm, dreamy look, and she again became capable of rambling in her line of argument, and of being puzzled on such subjects as potatoes. But we never forgot, as a revelation, the shrewd, calm woman who had appeared to us in our time of trouble, had advised, and managed, and suggested, and softened affairs, till one was ashamed of being discontented. We never forgot what my mother could be, when she was wanted.

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Yesterday I was sitting at her feet, watching the sun blaze himself to death behind the crags of Nicnicabarlah. My youngest boy had played himself to sleep upon her knee, and the light of the dying day smote upon her magnificent face as I turned and looked up into it. And then I saw the old, old look there, — the look of perfect, peaceful, happy goodness, — and I blessed God that there were such people in the world; and then in my memory I carried that dear calm face back through all the turbulent old times at Chelsea, and pondered there at her knee, until the darkness of the summer night had settled down on the peaceful Australian forest.

I have often spoken of my gentle sister Emma hitherto. I have represented her to you as a kind, sensible, handsome girl, with an opinion of her own, which opinion was generally correct, and which also was pretty sure to be given, — in short, an intensely loving and loveable, but rather uninteresting person, — a girl, I should have said, with every good quality except energy. I should have said, up to this time, that it would have been difficult to make Emma take a sudden resolution, and act on it with persistency and courage. She was, as *I* should have said, too yielding, and too easily persuaded, ever to have made a heroine, in spite of her energetically-given opinions on all subjects.

Whether I was right or not, I cannot say; for she *may* have lacked energy hitherto, but she did not now. When my mother showed that remarkable temporary development of character which followed on her being thoroughly aroused to the change in our position, Emma looked on her once or twice with affectionate awe, and then took up the burden of my mother's song and sung it busily and clearly through the live-long day. She sang the same old song as my mother did, though in clearer tones, — a song of ten thousand words set to a hundred tunes. She sang of cheerful devoted love, the notes of which, though vibrating in a Chelsea fog, make the air clearer than the sky of Naples.

I saw the change in her quickly. There was no abrupt statement of opinions now. She set herself to follow my mother's example quietly and humbly. Once, after looking at my mother, she came and kissed me, and said, "Who would have thought her so noble?" From that time she became my heroine.

Erne came to see us just as usual, and until long after it was all over, he never found out that anything was wrong. Our intense pride made us cunning. We were always exactly as we were in old times, whenever he called. My mother and Emma never sang in that ostentatious way when he was there, and all violent demonstrations of affection towards one another were dropped. He was perfectly unacquainted with our terrible strait all through. We knew that one word to him would

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have ended our troubles at once. We knew that fifty pounds would have tided us over the evil time, and that fifty pounds was to be had by asking; but we could n't ask from *him*. More, we must not let him guess that we were in difficulties, lest he should offer, and we should have peremptorily, and without the help of ordinary tact (for we were low-bred people), to refuse his offer.

If you ask, Were there any further motives which caused us to be so cautious in keeping our difficulties from Erne? I answer, They were simply these: — My father and mother, who did not know of Erne's love for Emma, were too proud and high-minded to take advantage of him. Joe and I, who had become aware of that attachment, would have thought that we were selling our sister; and as for Emma — why, I should not have liked to be the man who would have proposed such a thing to her. I would sooner have gone alone into Augusta Court or Danvers Street after dark, fifty times over, than have faced the tornado of passionate scorn which would have broken over any one's head who proposed to her to trade on Erne's love for her. And, moreover, although I had never seen Emma in a moment of terrible emergency, yet I knew, by a kind of instinct, that Emma's dove-like head, which we had only seen as yet turned from side to side in gentle complacency, or at most raised calmly in remonstrance, was, nevertheless, capable of towering up into an attitude of scornful defiance; and that that gentle loving voice, in which we had heard no shrill note as yet, was capable of other tones, — of tones as clear, as fierce, and as decided, as those of any scolding Peregrine.

This bitter trial of ours — (for three weeks, we elders were more than half starved, if you will excuse my mentioning it; and we pawned, to use my mother's forcible English, every stick of furniture and every rag of clothes that could be spared) — had a great effect on Emma. She never was dictatorial after this. Before this, she was as perfect as need be, but unluckily she thought so, and required sometimes what I, in my low vulgar way, would have called "shutting up." But, after my mother utterly astounded us all, by behaving as she did — taking the helm, playing first fiddle in the family choir, and drawing the family coach clear off the lee shore of despair (Harry says that there is a confusion of metaphor here, but Harry is a fool), — after those times, she was not only humbler in her suggestions, but developed a busy energy quite unlike the steady, peaceful diligence of the old easy-going times. When, shortly after this, in an emergency, she displayed courage and determination of the highest order, I was not in the least surprised.

How my father and I worked all this time! Real work was, alas! very slack, but we made work, — made things on specu-

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lation, — things which never were asked for, and which never were worth the coals they cost. My father, a perfect Quentin Matsys, set to work on a small wrought-iron gate, from designs furnished by Joe, which, if completed, was to make his fortune. It was never finished; but I have it now, and a beautiful piece of work it is.

Erne brought us news from Reuben. He was going on just the same, and seemed as great a favorite as ever with Sir George, and, what seemed still stranger, with young Mr. George. Erne always lowered his voice now when he spoke of his brother. There was no doubt, he said, that George regarded him with deep jealousy and dislike. "He is afraid," said Erne, "of my coming between my father and him. I *never* do that. When he and my father are together I am seldom there, and when present silent. The only time I get with my father is when he and my brother's wife are together. I always join these two, and we three are very happy together."

And during all this time, in the midst of short commons, anxiety, and hard work, I had on my mind the terrible guilty secret of that dreadful room up stairs, and of what I had seen there. I was as silent as death on the subject. I had had no opportunity of communicating with Reuben since the night of my adventure; and the one small piece of comfort in the whole matter was, that Reuben was still away at Stanlake, and would, in all probability, follow the family in the summer. Therefore, whatever happened, he must be held to be innocent.

Meanwhile, I had not even Joe to consult with; for, a few days after our adventure in Reuben's room, he met with a singular piece of good fortune, which seemed likely to affect materially his prospects in life.

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CHAPTER XXX.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: IN WHICH TWO GREAT PIECES OF GOOD FORTUNE BEFALL US, — ONE VISIBLE, THE OTHER INVISIBLE.

Sir George Hillyar, I found out afterwards, had sat in Parliament twice in his life, on the Tory interest. If there had been any interest more re-actionary than the Tory interest, he would have connected himself with it instantly. He had utterly outnewcastled Newcastle ever since he married his keeper's daughter: since he had brought a plebeian Lady Hillyar into the house, it became necessary for the family respectability to assert itself in some other direction, and it asserted itself in the direction of Toryism. Sir George, with the assistance of a few others, got up a little Tory revival; and they had so edified and improved one another, — so encouraged one another to tread in newer and higher fields of Toryism, — as to be looked on with respectful admiration by the rest of the party. And among this small knot of men who claimed, as it were, a superior sanctity, Sir George Hillyar had the first place conceded to him, as the most shining light of them all.

At this time, — at the time of our troubles, — a general election was approaching, and Sir George Hillyar, at the solicitation of a powerful body of men, determined to enter public life for the third time, and contest, when the time should come, the borough of Malton.

We heard this news from Mr. Compton, and were wondering why he had come to tell us about it, when he struck us all of a heap by announcing a most remarkable piece of good fortune. Sir George had offered Joe the post of private secretary, with a salary of two hundred a-year.

"And what do you think of that?" said Mr. Compton, triumphantly, to Joe.

Joe was trying to express his astonishment and delight, when he fairly burst into tears; and I do n't think any of us were very far behind him. We had always known that Sir George meant to provide for Joe, but we never expected such an offer as this to come at such a time.

"And what do you think of that? Is the salary enough?"

"Lord bless you, sir," said Joe; "never mind the salary. I 'd

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go barefoot in such a place as that. There is no telling how I may end."

"Indeed, you are right," said Mr. Compton; "and you thoroughly deserve your good fortune. Sir George has employed me for a long time to make inquiries about your capacity and steadiness, and you have enabled me to make such a report of you as has secured you this offer. I wish you every success."

So Joe departed, dressed like a gentleman, "burning high with hope." The family troubles were to come to an end in no time now. All the morning before he went he was restlessly and eagerly, with flushed face, laying out his plans for our future benefit; and Emma either was, or pretended to be, as enthusiastic and hopeful as he was, and encouraged, nay, even surpassed, his boldest flights of fancy, until, by her arts, she had got Joe to believe that all which had to be done, was already done, and to forget, for a time at least, that he was leaving us behind in poverty and wearing anxiety.

Delighted as we were with his good fortune, we sadly felt the loss of one familiar face at such a time as that. But soon we had other things to think of, for our troubles came faster and faster.

On the Saturday night after Joe had gone, I noticed that our three men were unusually boisterous. George Martin, the head man, struck me as meaning mischief of some kind, and I watched him carefully. He hurried his work in a somewhat offensive manner, struck with unnecessary vigor, upset the tools and swore at them, — did everything in fact that he ought not to do, except lame any of the horses; with *them* he was still the splendid workman that my father had made him. But in whatever he did, all the fore part of the afternoon, the other two followed suit, though with smaller cards. They did not speak to my father or me, but they told one another stories, which were received with ostentatious laughter; and Martin seemed inclined to bully my fellow-apprentice, Tom Williams. My father and I knew what they were going to do; they were going to strike, and make it easier by quarrelling with us.

They had not much chance of doing that. I was very angry, but I imitated my father as well as I could; and he, that afternoon, was more courteous, more patient, and more gentle than ever. About three o'clock my father was called out on business, and they, to my great delight, began quarrelling among themselves. How little I thought what that quarrel would lead to!

The moment my father's back was turned Jack Martin began on Tom Williams, the apprentice, again. At first he confined himself to impertinences, and kept addressing him as Werk'us

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(he was a parish boy, which made my father very jealous about having him ill-used or insulted, as Jack Martin well knew); but after a time, finding that Tom was as gentle and as patient as ever, he began to take further liberties, and dropped two or three things on his toes, and once threw a shoe at him. Meanwhile I would have died sooner than interfere on behalf of Tom, though I could have stopped Jack Martin at once.

Now the third and youngest of our men, who had been with us about a year, was a young Cornishman, Trevittick by name, a very taciturn, almost sulky fellow, who had resisted all our efforts to be intimate with him, but who had in his silent, sulky way conceived a great regard, certainly never exhibited in public, for Tom Williams, the apprentice. After he had been with us about a month he had obtained my father's consent to Tom's sharing his lodgings, at his, Trevittick's, expense. Shortly afterwards I made the surprising discovery that he and Tom used to sit up half the night reading mechanics and geology, and that Tom was bound to the very strictest secrecy on the subject. To this man Trevittick, therefore, whose personal appearance was that of a very strong Jew prize-fighter, with frizzly purple hair, I, on this occasion, left the defence of Tom Williams, with the most perfect confidence.

Trevittick was the most absolutely silent man I ever met in my life. Consequently, when Jack Martin had, for a pretended fault, taken Tom Williams by the hair of his head and shaken him, and Trevittick had said, in a short, sharp growl, "Leave that boy alone, you coward," Jack Martin stood aghast, and asked him what he said.

"You heerd what I said well enough. Do it."

Martin was very much surprised, and made no answer for an instant: but the word "yield" (or more correctly the expression "shut up") and Jack Martin were utter strangers; so he walked up to Tom Williams, collered him, and shook him again.

"Drop that boy now, Jack, or I 'll make 'ee," growled Trevittick once more, in a rather deeper tone.

After this, according to the laws of London honor, there remained nothing but for Jack Martin to call on Trevittick to come outside; which corresponds to the "after school" or "the old place" of your early days, my dear sir. But Jack had not time to say the words, when my father — who had been waiting outside, talking to a man on business — thought fit to come in, and to say in a very gentle, polite voice,

"Mates! mates! if you 'll be so good as to work in my time, and to quarrel arterwards in your own, I shall be obliged."

So they set to work again, I all the time, like a low-lifed boy as I was, thinking what a splendid fight there would be in Bat-

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tersea fields the next morning; for there were certainly not a dozen men in the prize-ring who could have stood long, before either Jack Martin or Trevittick.

But at six o'clock, although there was still work enough to keep my father and Tom Williams and me hard at it till two o'clock on Sunday morning, my father said it was time to knock off, and took out the men's money. Jack Martin was paid first, and he, I knew, would be spokesman. When he got his money he spit on it, and then jingled it in his closed hands.

"Come, Mr. Burton," he said, in a tone of injured innocence. "Why they're a-giving of a pound down at Jumston's. That's what Jumston's a-doing on. A-giving of a pound."

"And I think, Jack, as Mr. Jumston's giving two shillings too much. Why, that six shillings as you men are asking for, is six shillings off the kids' victuals. Six bob's worth of bread and butter, as I'm a true man."

Jack Martin began to talk himself into a passion, while my father raised himself on to the forge, and sat comfortably on the edge of the cinders.

"Well, then, I'll tell you where it is," said Jack Martin, "me and my mates must look to ourselves. White men, leave alone Druids and Foresters, is not slaves nor negro bones. Nor are they going to be, Mr. Burton; thank you for your kind intentions all the same. Come, sack us, will you? Take and give the sack to the whole three on us. Come."

"I don't want to give you the sack, Jack Martin," said my father. "I'm a ruined man, as you know. But I won't rob the kids."

"Then this is where it is," said the other, who had now got himself into as towering a passion as he could have wished; "the master as won't give the pound when asked, nor the sack when challenged, is no master for me or my mates."

"Well, you need n't get in a wax over it, old chap," said my father. "If you like to stay for eighteen bob, stay. *I* don't want you to go."

"Not if we know it, thank you," said Jack, louder than ever. "We must look to ourselves. If you won't give us the sack, why, then we take it. Now!"

"I've been a good and kind master to you, Jack. I've teached you your trade. And now, when things look a little black, you want to leave me. And you're not contented with leaving, but you are so ashamed of your meanness that you puts yourself into a passion, and irritates and insults me. Now it runs to this, Jack. You're a younger man than me: but if you hollers like that, in this here shop, I'll be blowed if I don't see whether I can't put you out of it. You'd better go."

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Jack was so astonished at such a speech as this coming from the pacific James Burton, that he departed wondering and rather ashamed. My father paid the other man, and he went, and then he turned to Trevittick, who was sitting on the anvil, and offered him his money.

"Never mind me, master," growled Trevittick, speaking now for the first time; "*I* ain't a-going to leave you. I *was* going this morning, but I've thought better of it. Never mind thikky money neither. I've a-got to fight to Jack Martin to-morrow morning, and I should be knocking that down, and a deal more too. You'm best owe me my wages a few weeks. I've saved lots, ain't I, Tom?"

But Tom had disappeared. And looking at my father I saw that he had colored scarlet up to the roots of his hair, but was quite silent. After a time he managed to say to Trevittick, "Thank ye, lad, — thank 'ee, kindly." That was all he said, and all that Trevittick wanted him to say.

Trevittick went out without another word; but in about half an hour he came back with Tom Williams, and silently set to work. When my father got behind him he began telegraphing to Tom Williams, and Tom replied by nodding his head nearly off, and smiling. Then the next time my father got near Tom he patted him on the back; by which things I knew that Tom had contrived to stop the fight, and that we should never know whether the Cornishman or the Londoner was the best man. Was I a little disappointed? Well, I am afraid I *was* a little disappointed. It was so very long ago, you must remember, and I did not write "Honorable" before my name at that time. But strict truth compels me to state that I *was* a little disappointed; I was indeed.

Meanwhile we three set to work, and worked far into the night: none of us any more conscious of the astounding piece of good fortune which had befallen us than was Fred, asleep on Emma's shoulder, with his balmy breath upon her cheek.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

GEORGE BEGINS TO TAKE A NEW INTEREST IN REUBEN.

THERE was no doubt at all that what Erne had said was true. So anxious was he not to come between his brother and his father, that he never interrupted them in a *tête-à-tête;* nay more, seldom saw much of his father except in the presence of George's wife, Gerty. These three, however, were very much together, and enjoyed one another's company immensely.

George was furious at this arrangement; he had set Gerty on his father expressly to see what she could do. She was making immense progress with the old man, when Erne stepped in, as it seemed to him, and interfered. He attributed Erne's eager pleasure in the society of his sister-in-law to the very deepest *finesse.* In his generous conduct he chose to see nothing but the lowest and meanest cunning.

"Look at him," he would growl to himself behind his book; "look at the artful cub, with his great eyes, and his gentle voice. Who would think he was such a young sneak? practising off his arts against those of my — Oh! my trebly-dyed fool of a wife. If she had had an ounce of brains, we might have had that will altered long ago. If I could only get her to quarrel with Erne! But she won't, and I dare n't scold her, for fear she should show signs of it before him. Oh! if she only knew what I was saying to her under my breath sometimes! — if she only knew that!"

George could hate pretty well, and now he got to hate Erne most decidedly. Poor fellow! he still loved his wife, but she made him terribly mad with her silliness sometimes. It was well for Gerty that she was under the protection of Sir George Hillyar. James Oxton would have trembled had he seen the expression of George's face now at times. The long-continued anxiety about his succession in his father's will was wearing him into a state of nervous excitement. He, at this time, took up with one of his old habits again. He used to go to London and play heavily.

Reuben had stayed about Stanlake so long that it was just as well, said Sir George, that he should stay on until they went to the Thames in the summer. Although he was only hired by the month, yet every one about the place would have been universally surprised if anything had occurred to terminate his engagement. He was considered now to be a sort of servant to Erne,

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who seemed much attached to him; but every one knew that it was by the wish of Sir George himself that Reuben was retained there. Also it is singular; but the well trained servants found out that Reuben was to be called Reuben, and that the name of Burton was not to be used at all; and when Joe made his appearance as secretary, they were instructed to address him as Mr. Joseph. Some of the older servants, who remembered Samuel, knew well enough why; and wondered to themselves whether or no he knew who Reuben was.

It was not very long after the arrival of the George Hillyars, that George, walking through the grounds, by the edge of the lake, near the boat-house, came across Reuben; who, with his boat-mending instinct, acting under the impression that he must do something, was scraping a fir sapling with a spoke-shave, trying to make a punt-pole of it; which is what no one, who cares for a ducking, ever did yet. He was also singing to himself a song very popular at that time among the London youth, which may be advantageously sung to the tune of "Sitch a getting up stairs": if you can only get the words, which I fear are lost forever. Reuben had his back to George, and George heard him sing, with the most determined cockney accent,—

"The very next morning he was seen,
In a jacket and breeches of velveteen.
To Bagnigge Wells then in a bran
New gownd she went with this 'ere dog's-meat man.
She had shrimps and ale with the dog's-meat man,
And she walked arm in arm with the dog's-meat man,
And the coves all said, what around did stan',
That he were a werry nobby dog's-meat man.
Oh he were such a handsome dog's-meat man,
Such a sinivating titivating dog's-meat man."

George Hillyar called out, "Hallo, you fellow!"

And Reuben, not seeing who it was, replied, "Hallo, you fellow! it is." And then he turned round, and, seeing who it was, was shent, and thought he was going to catch it.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said; "I thought you was the turncock come for the income-tax. There," he added, with one of his irresistible laughs, "don't be angry, your honor. I can't help talking nonsense at times, if I was hung for it."

"Are you the young waterman that my father has taken such a fancy to?"

Reuben sheepishly said he supposed he was.

"I should n't advise you to treat him to many such songs as you were singing just now. You should try to drop all this blackguardism if you mean to get on with him."

"Lord bless you, sir," said Reuben, "you 'd never make nothink of me. I've been among the coal barges too long, I have."

"I've seen many a swell made out of rougher stuff than you;

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you might make rather a fine bird in other feathers. How old are you?"

"Twenty, sir,"

"Has he given you any education?"

"Has who, sir?"

"Sir George, of course."

"No, sir," said Reuben, in wonder.

"What a shame," thought George to himself. "I wonder what he is going to do for him. There is one thing," he went on thinking, and looking at Reuben with a smile; "there is no mistake about the likeness: I shall make friends with the son of the bondwoman. I wonder who the dickens *she* was. I like this fellow's looks, much."

"Who is your friend?" he asked aloud, pointing to a young man who had just come up, and was waiting respectfully a little way off.

"That is my cousin James, sir."

James Burton, who has told some three quarters of the story hitherto, here approached. He was a tall, good-looking lad of about eighteen, with a very amiable face, and yet one which gave you the idea that he was deficient neither in brains nor determination. He approached George with confidence, though with great respect, and waited for him to speak.

"So you are Erne's friend, the blacksmith, hey?" said George.

James said "Yes."

"And how does your pretty sister do, eh, lad? I am very anxious to see this pretty flame of Erne's. If she is as pretty as Erne says she is, the young rogue must have an eye for beauty."

Jim blushed very much, and looked very awkward, at this free and easy way of implying an engagement between Erne and Emma. He said nothing, however, and immediately George turned away from him and began talking once more to Reuben.

This was their first interview, and very soon Reuben had won over George Hillyar as he had won his father. Another noticeable fact is that the old man perceived George's growing liking for Reuben, and seemed pleased at it. George had nothing to complain of in his father's treatment of him. So George was very kind indeed.

If Erne could have been got out of the way, George thought, everything must go right.

He had been home about six months, when one morning he would go rabbit-shooting, and so he sent for old Morton, the headkeeper, and they went out alone together.

It was a glorious May day, a day on which existence was a pleasure, and they left the moist valley and the thick dark woods far behind them, and climbed up the steep slope of the chalk

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down, to shoot among the flowering broom, which feathered the very loftiest summit. They stood up there, with the county at their feet like a map, and the happy May wind singing among the grass and the junipers around them.

Poor George felt quieter up here with his old friend. He had been to London the night before, playing, and losing heavily, and he had been more than usually irritated with Erne that morning. Instead of setting to work shooting, he sat down beside old Morton on the grass, and, taking off his hat, let the fresh wind blow his hair about.

"Morton, old fellow," he began, "I wish I had n't got such a cursed temper. You may n't think it, but I very often wish I was a better fellow."

"You are good enough for me, Master George," said the old man. "You were always my favorite."

"I know it," said George. "That is very queer. Did you think of me all the time I was away?"

"I always thought of my own plucky lad that I taught to shoot. I thought of you constant through all that weary time. But it 's come to an end now. You sowed your wild oats, it 's true."

"But I have n't reaped them," said George, with his head on his hands.

The old man took no notice of this; he went on: "And here you are home again, with the most beautiful of all the Lady Hillyars, since there were a Lady Hillyar. And Sir George coming round so beautiful, and all — "

"But I am disinherited," said George; "disinherited in favor of Erne."

"Not disinherited, sir. I know more than that."

"Next thing to it," said poor George. "I know as much as that."

"There 's time enough to alter all that; and, mark my word, Master George, I know Sir George better than any man living, and I can take liberties with him that you durst n't — bah! that Master Erne durst n't. And I tell you that sweet little lady of yourn has wound herself round his heart, in a way you little think. I held you on my knee when you were a little one, and I dare say anything to you. I hearn you cursing on her to yourself for a fool the other day. Now you leave her alone. Fool she may be, but she will do the work if it is to be done. I hearn 'em together, Sir George and her, the other day, and I says to myself, 'Either you are the silliest little hare of a thing as ever ran, or else you are the artfullest little — .' There, I forget. You let her alone. If it is to be done, she 'll do it."

"No, she won't, old fellow," said George. "There 's Erne in the way. There 's Erne, I tell you, man. He never leaves them

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alone together. He is always thrusting his cursed beautiful head in between them, and ruining everything. (Here he gave way, and used language about Erne which I decline to write, though there was not a single oath, or a single improper expression in it). Why, I tell you, Morton, that fellow's beauty, and amiability, and affectionate gentleness, and all that sort of thing, as nearly won me as possible. At one time I was saying to myself, 'If my father denies me justice, I shall be able to get it from him'; and so I thought, until I saw that all this amiability and gentleness was merely the art of a beautiful devil. When I saw him declining to do battle with me, like a man, and saw him sneak in between my wife and my father, then I said to myself, — then I said to myself, — Oh, stop me, old Morton, and don't let me talk myself mad. I want to be better. I swear to God I want to be better. But I am sinking into hell, and there is no one to save me. Where's James Oxton? Why was he fool enough to let me leave him? And Aggy; how these shallow-brained women delude us, with their mincing airs of wisdom! See what they have brought me to now."

Perhaps, if the poor fellow had chosen to make friends in his own rank in life, he might have found one honest, educated man, who would have set everything right for him; at all events have shown him that his suspicions of Erne were incorrect, and have made the ordinary routine of life, in his own rank, more pleasant to him. But he had, through vanity and idleness, early in life acquired the taste for being the greatest man in the company; and the only company where he was king was the company of his inferiors, and the passion stuck to him, and so there he was, at the turning point of his life, telling his troubles to a foolish old gamekeeper.

The old man said nothing to turn away George's wrath from Erne. Why should he? George had always been his favorite, and he believed what he said about Erne. No; he only tried to soothe the poor fellow with commonplaces, and let him sit with his head in his hands until the wild fit had passed over. Then old Morton was glad to hear him change the conversation.

"What do you think of that young Reuben?" asked George.

"Reuben," said the old man, laughing; "why, every one is fond of Reuben. A merry, cheeky young dog."

"I have taken a great fancy to the fellow myself. I have a very great mind to take him for my servant."

"I dare say he would make a good one, master," said Morton. "But I should have thought you had had one too many of that name. His father was n't so satisfactory an investment as might be, and —"

"His father," said George, looking quickly round. "Are you mad?"

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"Do you mean to say," said the other eagerly, "that you don't know that this Reuben's name is Burton, and that he is the son of your old servant Samuel, by, — you know who?"

George started up, and stood looking at Morton, silent and deadly pale, with his hands clasped wildly in his hair, for nearly a minute, — a ghastly sight to see. Then with a hollow groan he sank on his knees, and his look of blank horror was changed into one of pitiful entreaty.

"Morton! Morton! don't kill me. The dog has deceived me. Don't tell me that *she* is alive too. Don't kill me by telling me that."

"Get up from the grass, Master George. You frighten me. She died ten year ago, or more."

The look of terror left George's face by degrees. It was evident that he had had a fearful shock.

"How long ago did she die, did you say?"

"She died when Reuben was about ten years old. Jim Burton, the Chelsea blacksmith, asked me to come over to her funeral, as having known her once. And I went. Reuben was the *second* child, Master George. There was one that died."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Positive and certain sure. I took care to be. I see its little coffin carried to the grave. And the poor thing, *she* told me herself that it was the eldest."

"He wrote and told me," said George, "when he was transported, that she was dead, and —. There, we have talked enough about that. Do you know that he and I have quarrelled?"

It was Morton's turn to look astonished now. "You and who?" he said, with a blank stare.

"I and Samuel Burton have quarrelled."

"Do you mean to tell me he is not dead yet?"

"Curse him, no. He has far more life left in him than you have, my faithful old friend. He came to my office in Palmerston the other day, and I quarrelled with him."

"That was unwise."

"It was; but, at all events, he is safe for the present. He is at Perth, in Western Australia, 14,000 miles away."

"I am glad of that," said old Morton. "I suppose he *dare n't* come home, eh!"

"Oh, dear, no," said George. "He dare n't come to England. He would get life for it. Come, let us begin."

They began shooting. Morton, with the license of a keeper, combined with that of a confidential friend, said, "Mind the dogs, sir. In your present state of nerve, mind the dogs."

But George shot beautifully. The old trick had come back to him again after a few months' practice; and his hand and eye

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were as true as ever. He shot recklessly, but wonderfully well, appearing all the time to be so utterly absent and distraught, that old Morton kept on saying, "Mind the dogs, sir; for Gawd's sake, mind the dogs. It 's old Beauty, the governor's pet; and if anything happens to that there spaniel, — Lord a mercy, look at that. I say, Master George, hold hard, sir. You ain't in the humor to shoot rabbits before Clumber spannels worth twenty guineas a-piece. Hold hard, sir. Now, do hold hard."

"I 'm shooting better than ever I shot in my life," said George.

"Too beautiful by half. But leave off a minute. That last shot was too risky; it were indeed."

"All right," said George, going on with his loading. "Have you seen this girl Emma that Erne *raffoles* about?"

"Yes, sir. She is daughter of Jim Burton, the Chelsea blacksmith. Here, Beauty; here, Frolic. There, put down your gun a bit, Master George. There."

"Is her name Burton, too?" said George. "Why, the air seems darkened with Burtons. I thought somehow that she was cousin to Joseph, the Secretary. Or did I dream it?"

"Why, *his* name is Burton, too, and she is his own favorite sister," said the old man. "He is Reuben's cousin. But you mus'n't say the name of Burton in that house. It 's a word mus'n't be said at Stanlake."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, and nobody don't know; and very probably, with an obstinate man like the governor, there ain't very much to know. We were children together, and I know him better than any man alive, and may be like him better than any man alive, except one. But I tell you that, in the matter of obstinacy, Balaam's ass is a black-and-tan-terrier to him. For instance, *I* don't know to this day whether or no he knows that Reuben is Sam, the steward-room boy's son. Mr. Compton don't know either. Mr. Compton says he has never forgiven Sam. We soon found out that we were to call Reuben by his Christian name. And he makes Joe Burton call hisself Joseph."

"But this Emma"; asked George, "is there any chance of Erne's putting his foot in it with her?"

"He swears he will marry her," said Morton. "The governor did the same thing himself, and so, may be, won't find much fault."

"Do you know anything about the girl? What is she like?"

"She is a fine-made, handsome girl. But she is better than that. I want to tell you a story about her. I have known her father, Jim Burton, Lord love you, Master George, why as long as I 've known Mr. Compton; and they was two boys together,

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was Mr. Compton and him. You ain't got a cigar to give away, sir?

"I have known James Burton, sir," continued the old man, "ever since I was a boy, and I have always kept up an occasional acquaintance with him: and one day, just before you came home, I was over there, and he said to me, laughing, 'What a game it is to hear they young folks a-talking, good Lord!' I asked him what he meant, and he said, 'Why, my girl Emma has been pitching it into Master Erne like one o'clock. Such airs with it, too, — pointing her finger at him, and raising her voice quite loud, calling him by his Christian name, and he answering of her as *fierce* —' And I asked what he and the girl fell out about, and he said that Master Erne had been going on against you, — that you were n't no good; and that she 'd up, and given it to him to his face."

"She must be rather a noble person; I'll remember *him* for this," said George. "Come, Morton, let us go home."

So he walked rapidly homeward in deep thought, and Morton guessed what he was thinking about, — Reuben. Reuben, George saw, was his own son. There was a slight confusion about the date of his birth, and the poor woman had lied to Morton; but there was no doubt about his features. That square honest face could belong to no son of the thin-faced, hook-nosed Burton. No, there was the real Hillyar face there. That unset mouth was not Hillyar either, certainly, but he knew where that came from. Yes; now he knew what it was that attracted him so strangely to Reuben from the first. Reuben had looked on him with the gentle eyes of his dead mother.

The old keeper once, and once only, ventured to look into his face. He hardly knew him, he was so changed since they had gone that road two hours before. His face was raised, and his eyes seemed set on something afar off. His mouth was fixed as though he had a purpose before him, and his whole expression was softened and intensely mournful. The old man had seen him look so when he was a boy; but that was very, very long ago.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

GERTY'S HYBERNATION TERMINATES.

THE sun was so warm on the south side of the house, that Gerty had come out on the terrace, and was drinking in the floods of warmth and light into her being. The first thing she had done, her very first instinct after a few minutes of what was dreadfully like sun-worship, was to dash at the flowers with a childish cry of delight, — anemones, ranunculuses, tulips, narcissuses, all new to her. George found her with her hands full of them, and held out his arms. She gave a laugh of joy and sprang into them, covering his head with her flowers.

Her George had come back to her arms with the warm weather. The ugly cold winter had passed. It was that which had made George cross to her; every one was splenetic during an English winter. The French laughed at us about it. If they could only get back to the land of sunshine and flowers, he would never be unkind to her. If she and he and baby could only get back again to the dear old majestic forests, among the orchises and lobelias and Grevilleas, with the delicious aromatic scent of the bush to fill their nostrils, they would be happy for evermore. How faint and sickly these narcissuses smelt after all, beautiful as they were. One little purple vanilla flower was worth them all. Bah! these flowers smelt like hair-oil, after the dear little yellow oxalis of the plains. She covered his face with kisses, and said only, —

"Take me back, dear, — take me back to the old forest again. We shall never be happy here, dear. The flowers all smell like pomatum; there is no real warmth in the sun. And it is all so close and confined: there is no room to ride; I should like to ride again now, but there is no place to ride in. Take me back. We were happier even at Palmerston than here. But I want to go back to the bush, and feel the sun in my bones. *This* sun will never get into your bones. Take me back to the Gap, dear."

"And leave my father here?" said George, laughing. "For shame."

"Why should n't he come too?" said Gerty.

"You had better propose it to him," said George, kissing her again.

"I will this very night," said the silly little woman. And,

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what is more, she did. And, what is still more than that, Sir George, after sitting silent a few minutes, said, "I 'll be hanged if I *don't*." And after Gerty had twittered on for ten minutes more in praise of the country of the Eucalypti, he looked up and said to the ambient air, "Why the deuse *should n't* I have a spree?" And when she had gone on another quarter of an hour on the same subject, he looked up again, and then and there wished he might be wicked-worded if he did n't. I believe he would have run over, if circumstances which have made the history of these two families worth writing had never occurred. But, — to save the reader any unnecessary anxiety, — he never did.

Poor little Gerty! How she revelled in this newly-restored love of her husband's. How she got drunk upon it. How the deep well-springs of her love overflowed, and not only drowned George and the baby, but floated every object it came near: horses, butlers, dogs, tulips, ladies'-maids, ranunculuses, and grooms. It was well she was a fool. She was so glad to see George take such notice of the young waterman. What a kind heart he had! Poor little thing; who would have dared to tell her the truth about him and Reuben? If she could have been made to understand it, which I doubt, I think it would have gone far to kill her.

Sir George Hillyar marked George's increased attention to Reuben with evident satisfaction. One day, overtaking George in the shrubbery, he took George's arm with a greater show of affection than he had ever done before, and walked up and down, talking very kindly to him. They spoke about no family matters, but it was easy to see that George was gaining in his father's favor. As they were talking earnestly together thus, Mr. Compton and Erne came round the corner on them. Mr. Compton was very much surprised, but noticed that the arm which Sir George took from his elder son's, to shake hands with his old friend, was transferred to Erne, and that George was left to walk alone.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

J. BURTON'S STORY: THE GHOST SHOWS A LIGHT FOR THE SECOND TIME.

It was about three days after our men had struck and left us, that something took place which altered the whole course of our lives in the most singular manner.

It was a dark and very wet night. The King's Road, as I turned out of it into Church Street, at about half past eleven, was very nearly deserted; and Church Street itself was as silent as the grave.

I had reached as far as the end of the Rectory wall, when, from the narrow passage at the end of the lime-trees, there suddenly came upon me a policeman, our own night-policeman, a man I knew as well as my own fellow-apprentice. At this I, being in a humorous mood, made a feint of being overcome with fear, and staggered back, leaning against the wall for support.

"Stow larks, Jimmy," said the constable, in a low, eager voice. "Something's going wrong at home. I have orders to stop you, and take you to the Inspector."

"So it had come then," I thought to myself, with a sickening feeling at my heart. I could'nt find words to say anything for a moment.

"I had no orders to take you into custody, Jimmy," the constable whispered; "only to tell you to come to the Inspector. There's nothing again your hooking on it, if you're so minded."

I answered, returning as I did — and, heaven help me! sometimes do still — on occasions of emergency — to my vernacular, "I ain't got no call for hooking on it, old chap. Come on." ("Cub awd," is more like the way I said it than anything else).

And so we came on: my old friend the constable continuing to force home the moral that I were n't in custody, and that there were n't nothink again hooking on it, until, at the corner of the place I have chosen, for fear of an action for libel, to call Brown's Row, we came against the man whom, also for fear of an action for libel, I call Detective Joyce.

He was alone, under the lamp of the Black Lion. When he saw us, he took us over to the other side of the street, and said, quite in a low voice, "Is this the young man Burton!"

I, with that self-assertion, with that instinct of anticipating adverse criticism, — that strange, half cowardly feeling, that there

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is some unknown advantage in having an innings before the other eleven get in, — which is a characteristic of the true Londoner, — replied that it was, and that any cove who said that I had been up to anythink, was a speaker of falsehoods.

"Well, we all guess that," said the Inspector. "What we want to find out is; how much do you know about your precious flash cousin Reuben's goings on? I don't suppose you 'll tell us till you are under cross-examination, as you will be pretty soon. You 're in custody, lad. And *silence*, mind. There; I 've seen a deal that 's bad, and that 's wrong, but I never saw anything that shook my faith in folks like this. Why, if any man had told me, six weeks ago, that old Jim Burton, the blacksmith, would have harbored Bardolph's gang and Sydney Sam, I 'd have knocked him down, I think."

"He never knew nothing of it, sir," I said eagerly. "Me and Joe ——"

At this point my old friend, the night-policeman, garotted me with singular dexterity. As he held his hand over my mouth, and I struggled, he said to the Detective Inspector, —

"Come, sir. Fair play is a jewel. Jimmy, — I should say, the boy, — is in custody. Take and caution him, sir. I asks you in fairness, take and caution on him."

The Inspector laughed. "Everything you say will be put in evidence against you. I mean, you d—d young fool, hold your tongue."

This took place against the railings of a milk-shop, on the left-hand side as you go down towards the river, opposite a short street which leads into Paulton Square (which, at the time I speak of, was "Shepherd's Nursery," or, to old Chelsea folk, "Dove-house Close"). This narrow street, which is now widened, was in my time Brown's Row, a mere court of six-roomed houses, from among which rose majestically the vast old palace which was in the occupation of my father.

As I stood there, with the horror and disgrace on me of being in custody for the first time in my life, with the terror of I know not what upon me; I could make out, in spite of the darkness and the rain, the vast dark mass of our house towering into the sky to the west. I could make out the tall, overhanging, high-pitched roof, and the great dormer-window, which projected from it, towards us, to the east; the windows of the Ghost's room, — of Reuben's room, — of the room where I had stood helpless, waiting for my death. I knew that the present complication was connected with that room: and with a sick heart I watched the window of it. I was right.

How long did we stand in the rain, — the Inspector, constable, and I? A hundred years, say. Yet I looked more at that

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window than anywhere else; and at last I saw it illuminated,—dimly at first, then more brightly; then the light moved: and in a moment the window was dark again. And, while I saw all this, with throbbing eyes, the Inspector's hand closed on my arm with such a grip as made me glad I was a blacksmith, and he whispered in my ear:—

"You young rascal! You see that light? Take me to the room where that light is, or you 'd better never have been born! And tell me this, you young scoundrel: Are there two staircases, or only one?"

Now that I saw clearly and entirely, for the first time, what was the matter, I wished to gain a moment or two for thought. And with that end, I (as we used to say in those times) "cheeked" the detective.

"Tell you! Not if I know it! And everything to be took down in evidence! Find out for yourself. I 'm in custody, am I? Then take me to the station and lock me up. I ain't going to be kept out in the rain here any longer. Who the deuse are you, cross-questioning and Paul-Pry-ing? What 's your charge against me?"

"You 'll know that soon enough, you young fool," said the Inspector.

"But I 'll hear it now. I want to be took to Milman's Row and the charge made; that 's what I want. And I 'll have it done, too, and not be kep' busnacking here in the rain. I 'll make work for fifty of you in two minutes, if you don't do one thing or the other."

And, so saying, I put my two forefingers in my mouth. What I meant to do, or what I pretended I meant do, is no business of any one now; all that concerns us now is that I never did it and never meant to. I have mentioned before that Alsatia was only just round the corner.

Our policeman caught my hands, and said, pathetically, "Jimmy, Jimmy, you would n't do such a thing as that!" And the Inspector said, "You young devil, I 'll remember you!"

"Am I in custody, sir?" I asked.

"No, you ain't," said the Inspector. "You may go to the devil if you like."

"Thank you," I said. "Common sense and courtesy are not bad things in their way, don't you think? I shall (now I have bullied you into time for thinking) be delighted to inform you that there is only *one* staircase; that I shall be glad to guide you to that room; that I sincerely hope you may be successful; and that I only hope you will do the thing as quietly as possible."

My thoughts were these. Reuben, thank heaven, was safely away: and really, when I came to think of the annoyance and

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disgrace that Mr. Samuel Burton had caused us, I looked forward to his capture and re-transportation with considerable indifference, — not to say complacency. Consequently I went willingly with them.

As we came to our door we came upon four other constables, and one by one we passed silently into the old hall. As I passed our sitting-room door, I could see that my mother and Emma were sitting up and waiting for me, and immediately went on, considering what effect the disturbance, so soon to begin, would have on them. And then, going as silently as was possible up the broad staircase, we stood all together in the dark, outside Reuben's room. What should we find there?

At first, it appeared nothing; for the door being opened, the room seemed empty. But in another moment that magnificent ruffian I have called Bill Sykes, had sprung into sight from somewhere, and cast himself headlong at the constables, who were blocking up the door. For one instant I thought he would have got through and escaped; but only for one. I saw him locked in the deadly grip of a young Irish constable, by name Murphy, and then I saw them hurling one another about the room for a few seconds till they fell together, crashing over a table. They were down and up, and down again, so very quickly, that no one had time to interfere. Sykes had his life-preserver hanging at his wrist, but could not get it shifted into his hand to use it, and the constable had dropped his staff, so that the two men were struggling with no more assistance than Nature had given them. Before or since I have never seen a contest so terrible as between this Englishman and this Irishman.

And after the first few seconds no one saw it but me. The sound of the table falling was the signal for a rush of four men from the inner room, who had, to use a vulgar expression, "funked" following the valiant scoundrel Sykes, but who now tried to make their escape, and found themselves hand to hand with the policemen. So that Sykes and the noble young Irishman had it all to themselves for I should think nearly a minute.

For in their deadly grip, these two did so whirl, and tumble down, and roll over, and get up, and fall again, that I could not, for full that time, do what I wanted. It was clearly a breach of the Queen's peace, and I had a right to interfere on those grounds even; and, moreover, this dog Sykes, in this very room, had coolly proposed the murder of my own humble self. It was for these reasons that I wished, if possible, to assist this young Irishman; but I could get no opportunity for what seemed to me a long while. At last they were both on their feet again, locked together, and I saw that the Irishman's right hand was clear, and heard it come crashing in with a sickening rattle among Sykes's

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teeth. Then I got my arm round Sykes's neck, and in spite of his furious efforts managed to hold him fast all the while that Murphy — bah! — it is too terrible — until, while I was crying out shame, and threatening to let him go, the burglar and I fell together to the ground, and Murphy came down on Sykes heavily, breaking three of his ribs. Yet, in spite of his terrible injuries, in spite of his broken jaw, and such internal injuries as prevented his being tried with the rest, this dog, whom I would not save from hanging to-morrow, never, in spite of his agony, gave one whine of pain from first to last. When we thought we had secured him, and a constable was preparing his handcuffs, he raised his horribly battered face, and burst out again, striking Murphy a blow behind the ear, which made the poor fellow totter and reel, and come headlong down with his nose bleeding, snoring heavily, quite insensible. It took the whole force of us even then to secure this man, though he was so desperately injured.

But at last there came a time when Sykes lay on his stomach on the floor, conquered and silent, but unyielding; when Murphy, the young Irish constable, had left off snoring so loud, and had made three or four feeble efforts to spit; when Bardolph and Pistol, with three other scoundrels, — for whom I have not time to find imaginary names, and whose real names, after a long series of convictions and aliases, were unknown to the police, and possibly forgotten by themselves (for there are limits to the human memory), — were walked off ironed down the stairs; when the constables had lit candles and the room was light; when there was no one left in it after the struggle, but the Inspector, and Sykes, with the one man who watched him, and Murphy, with the one man who raised his head and wiped his mouth, and myself, who cast furtive glances at the door of the inner room, and my father, who stood in the door-way in his shirt and trousers, pale and fierce, and who said: —

"This is some more of Samuel Burton's work. This has come from harboring his boy, — his bastard boy, — that I treated like one of my own. I knew that I was utterly ruined three days ago. But I thought I might have been left to die without disgrace. May God's curse light on Samuel Burton night and day till his death! Have you got him?"

"We have n't got him, Burton," said the Inspector. "But I am afraid that, in spite of your rather clever denunciation of the man you have shielded so long under the wing of your respectability, we must have you. You are in custody, please."

This was the last and worst blow for my father. He spoke nothing for an instant, and then said hoarsely, pointing to me, "Are you going to take *him*?"

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The Inspector said no; that he did not want me, but told me to be very cautious, and mind what I was about, which I fully intended to do without his caution. In fact, I was doing so now.

Where was my cousin Samuel? When would the Inspector notice the door into the other room? And would my father ask me to get his coat? I was very anxious about this last matter. Either I must have gone for it, or have excited the Inspector's suspicions; and I wanted to stay where I was.

In a few moments he saw the door. My father and I followed him towards it, intending to give him our assistance should there be any one there. He flung open the door, and, to my surprise, the room was empty. The bed, the old box, the lumber, were all gone. And, moreover, the hole that I had made in the floor three years before was there no longer. I saw at once that the scoundrels had by means of that hole discovered the vast depth between the floor and the ceiling below, and had utilized it. They had cunningly used old wood too, in their work; and so, walking over the place where the hole had been, I felt no less than four boards loose under my feet; and then I came to the conclusion that no less a person than Samuel Burton was stowed away below.

I ought to have given him up. And I should like to have given him up; but when it came to the push I would not. My heart failed me. I stood there until the Inspector turned to go; and the secret of the loose boards was left undiscovered.

If I had known that no one was under there, except poor trembling Nym, I might have given *him* up, perhaps. But Samuel Burton was not there at all. Samuel Burton had found that William Sykes was rather too clumsy and incautious a gentleman to have anything to do with, and had, in his usual manner, pitched the whole gang overboard. That is to say, that, seeing Reuben safe out of the way, he had dropped a line to Scotland Yard, which resulted as we have seen. Samuel himself was somewhere else, at far different work.

I was furiously indignant at my father's being arrested. Looking at it from my point of view, it seemed to me to be a perfectly unnecessary insult. I suppose it could not be helped. One thing was certain, however, that it would be the last ounce on the camel's back to him, and that in future my father would never raise his head again in England.

Two things remained to be done, — the one, to fetch my father's coat and waistcoat from his bedroom, which was not difficult; and the other, to break the fact of his arrest to my mother, which was easy enough, but not a pleasant task by any means, — at all events in anticipation.

But when I knocked at their bedroom, I found her up and

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dressed, with his things ready; and not only her, but Emma. And my mother only said cheerily, "Dear, dear. What a shame. Going and taking of father. There, Jim, my dear, take him his coat and waistcoat; and here 's the old horse-rug. And we 'd best sit up to go for Mr. Child and Mr. Chancellor in the morning to bail him. There, cut away, old man. They ain't took you, I know; for I listened to 'em. On the stairs I did. God bless us, father will be in a taking. We must have him home by breakfast, or they sausages will spile. Cut away, or he 'll catch his death."

And so she chattered on, and packed me out of the room. But when I was gone, Emma tells me, she broke out into wild hysterical wrath, and denounced fiercely and wildly, — denounced Bill Joyce (as she irreverently called the Inspector), and said that marrying eaves-droppers and earwigs might be some folks' line, but that it was not hers, and never had been. She said how true her instinct was, to have refused to say anything to the man twenty years before; though she thought that even an earwig might have forgotten in that time, and not disgraced her husband like that; and so she went on until she got quieter. And at last she said, as she herself tells me, and not Emma,

"May God forgive me, as I forgive them all. May God forgive Samuel Burton, whom I met on the stairs last week, and fainted away stone-dead on account on. He has been an unlucky man to us. It 's on his account that I hate the name of Hillyar. It was through his going to them, child, that all our troubles came about. He was not so bad till he got corrupted by that devil George Hillyar. I hate the name. I am glad of one thing in this break-up, my Emma; and that is this: we shall see no more of this Master Erne. You are a child, and don't know. But I tell you, that the time is come for you to part with him. Better too soon than too late. Red eyes are better than a broken heart."

My mother tells me that, as she said this, she looked at Emma, and saw, — why, many things; among others, that it *was* too late. Emma was sitting opposite her, deadly pale, with a worn, wearied look on her face, but perfectly quiet and self-possessed. She said,

"What you say is very true, dear. He and I must part for ever. Perhaps, mother, if this had not happened, I might have begged to have a little, only a very little more of him; for ——. But now, I thank God, that has become impossible. This business will separate us forever; and it is best so. I might have fallen in love with him, for aught we know, and what a sad business that would have been; would it not? May I see him only once, — just to wish him good-bye? Only once, mother? O, mother! mother! only once."

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"No," said my mother, promptly, "that is all fiddlededee, and stuff, and nonsense. It 's all over and done, and dead and buried, and I won't have it took and dug up again. Take and go along with you, I tell you."

And so my mother scolded her, and then went to her solitary bed, — solitary the first time for twenty years, — and lay down and wept wildly. "I am a wicked, stupid, useless woman, oh, Lord," she said. "But, Lord! I did not see it. And it is to be visited on her head. The father's upon the children; my folly on her. But, Lord! it will break her heart, — my own Emma's heart. I seen it to-night, and I know it. Oh, Lord! wicked woman that I am, let the judgment fall on me, Lord! Let me suffer, but take her to thy bosom and comfort her."

* * * * *

We shall see how my mother's prayer was answered.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SIR GEORGE'S ESCRITOIRE.

Poor Reuben Burton, whose only crime had been faithfulness to the scoundrel he called father, received a message that some one wished to speak to him at a certain public-house, and was then and there quietly arrested and taken to London; so that during the events which followed he was in prison, be it remembered. That he was *very* wrong in receiving his father into the Burtons' house at Chelsea we cannot say. But a little more resolution would have saved the Burtons an infinity of trouble.

The Hillyars wondered where he was. Erne had the impudence to propose cutting the dam to search for his body; and Sir George said, loftily, that it was, in his opinion, rather contemptible taste in Erne, to refer, to allude, however faintly, to an idiotic and highly expensive escapade, which ought to be consigned to oblivion. Erne proposed to send for Joseph, the secretary, to take his father's words down; and so they had one of their numerous pleasant squabbles, — the one among them all which Erne remembered best, — while Gerty sat and laughed at them.

She had taken the baby, and a pile of flowers, and had sat herself down under the south wall, opposite the sun-dial, just outside the drawing-room window, in a blazing heat, fit to roast a peacock;

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and there she was now, with the baby and the flowers, doing something or another with them, though whether she was nursing the flowers, or tying up the baby, it was hard to say. There she was, as happy as ever a little mother was, baking herself, and cooing in her infinite contentment.

Her suggestion about Reuben Burton, which she made in perfect faith, was that he had gone into the township, and got on the burst. This brought the heartiest roar of laughter from George that we have ever heard him indulge in. Gerty was very much delighted. She determined that she had said something very good, and must try it again.

The old butler never went to bed before Sir George, but always sat up in one of the easy-chairs, in the third or smallest drawing-room, with the door open. For exactly opposite this door was the door of Sir George's study, and so, if Sir George went to sleep in his chair, as he very often did, the butler could, after a reasonable time, go in and wake him up, and take him to bed, generally in a very stupid state.

But very often the butler would go to sleep, and his candle would go out, and he would wake in the dark, wondering where he was, and would go in to rouse Sir George, and would find that Sir George had gone to bed hours ago, and that the sparrows outside, after a sleepy night's debate of it (that honorable member the nightingale having been on his legs for nearly four hours, and having concluded his answer to the Opposition about daybreak), had woke up and divided, and had all got into the wrong lobbies, and were pitching into the tellers: in other words, that it was broad daylight. And this very night he went to sleep in this way, and let his candle burn down.

Sir George that evening had complained of its being cold, which it most certainly was not, and had ordered the fire to be lit in his study. The butler in the little drawing-room, snoozing in the chair, did not feel cold. But Sir George sat close before the blaze, musing, and looking into the coals, thinking intensely.

It may have been this, to some extent, which caused certain things to happen this very evening, of which you will hear immediately. We cannot say. We cannot see the inside of a man's head, unless we open it. But I don't think it was a good thing for Sir George, with his apoplectic habit, to sit close before a hot fire, thinking intensely.

While we are writing we have looked into the fire, and all that we have seen there was Glen Roy and Glen Spean, filled with gleaming ice, and the little double summit of Mealderry, like an island in the midst of it; in fact, Lyell has been answerable for our coal formations; in the which thing, there is a certain sort of fitness. To-morrow it will be some one else who

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is answerable for the vagaries. To-morrow in the fire, one may see Messieurs Assolant and Renan receiving, at the International Exhibition of 1873, at Chicago or Charleston, as the case may be, the Aluminium medal for having achieved, and entirely and utterly mastered, the subjects of the English nation and the Christian religion. Or, possibly even, M. Thiers in the act of being presented with a new pair of brass spectacles by the Emperor, for his accounts of the battle of Waterloo, and other battles; which, doubtless, as specimens of military history, stood alone until Cousin Tom and Cousin Jerry fell out in America.

The fact is that, if you are a real fire-worshipper, you can't control the fantastic images which present themselves to your retina, when you have your brain rather full of blood, and are comfortably looking into a good coal fire. As in the beautiful old optical experiment of the glass globe in the dark (which some wiseacres, one of whom, at least, ought to have known better, have invested with supernatural properties, and called the Magic Crystal), you *see* what you are thinking about, as you do in dreaming, though in an inferior degree.

Sir George Hillyar sat and looked into the fire. From the first moment he looked there he saw four figures. They had been with him nearly all day, and now they stared at him out of the coal chasms. They were the figures of his two wives, with their two sons; and, as he looked at them, he thought deeply and intensely over the results of his life.

How well he rememberod his first courtship. What a noble, square-faced, bold-eyed young fellow he was, when he first met Kate Bertram at the Lymington ball. How well he could remember her that first night. How beautiful she was; and he the madman, seeing, as he did, the wild devil in her eyes, admired it, and was attracted by it. "She has a spice of the devil in her," he had said to a friend. She had indeed.

And then by degrees he had found out the truth. At first he had laughed at the horrid idea; then he had grown moody over it; then he had entertained it sometimes, and at last he had taken it to his bosom and nursed it. She had never loved him. She had always loved that rattling, merry sailor, Lieutenant Somes. Then he was slowly growing to hate her; until, at last, she justified his hatred by dishonoring him.

And then her son. Had he been just to George? Had George's wickedness justified all the neglect he had received? Did he, the father, never feel something like satisfaction at the boy's career, as furnishing him with an excuse for the dislike he had always felt for him? And how much of that reckless despair had been caused by this very same neglect? These were terrible questions. A few months ago he would have answered

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them by an overwhelming flood of self-justification; but death was drawing nearer, and after death the judgment. He left them unanswered.

Was he doing right in disinheriting George? Was he not cutting off George's last hope of reform by impoverishing him in this way? He went to the escritoire, let down the desk of it, and, sitting down before it, took out his will and began reading it.

Eight thousand a year to Erne, and George left nearly a beggar, with the title and establishment to keep up. It was not just. He said aloud, "I fear I am *not* doing justice to George. But my Erne ——" He laid down the will again, and went once more and sat before the fire.

Then the old man lived some more of his life over again. His brain was very active, and his memory most wonderfully good to-night. He felt again the indignation, the shame, and the horror, which had torn him, as it were, to pieces, when he discovered that his wife had fled. The dislike which he had allowed to grow up in his mind towards her had been no preparation for *that*. Could he ever have dreamt that she would have *dared?* Could he ever have supposed that his calm, gentlemanly obstinacy would have driven her to commit such a nameless, horrible crime (for so it was to him) as to leave the husband she hated for the man she loved? The agony of recollecting the shame of that dreadful time brought the blood humming into his ears; but it went back again, and throbbed itself into stillness once more.

For, passing through, in his fancy, in his memory, lightly enough, and yet correctly, the period which followed on this, the great, horrible shame of his life; he went through a time of dull despair; then a longer one of godless cynicism; and then a longer one yet, of dull acquiescence in things as they were; the time when he believed that God had got tired of him, and had put him aside to be dealt with only after death. And, when his imagination had taken him through these sad, sad old times, and he had felt, let us hope in a less degree, all his old agonies once more, then the old gentleman's face began to brighten, and his stern set mouth to relax into a happy smile.

For, wandering on through the wood of his life, — a wood, as he humbly acknowledged, full of strange paths (of which paths he had generally taken the wrong one), tangled with brambles which he had never broken through, — going on, I say, through this wood of his life, which he now began to see was not an honest English copse, but a labyrinth, in which he had never turned the right way, and which he was now going through all again, — he came to this: —

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He began to remember the dear old scent, — far dearer to him, and some others, than the whiff one gets opposite Piesse or Rimmel's shop, — of his newly-loaded gun. Then he thought of fresh trodden turnips in September. Then a pheasant whirred above his head; and then he was breast-high among the golden fern under the browning hazels; and then, rustling ankle-deep in the fallen leaves, came Mary Hawkins, the game-keeper's daughter, the beautiful and the good, and her arm was round his neck and her breath was on his cheek, and she said to him, "It is not too late, yet, George. God has sent me to save you, my love."

And when she had done her work God took her; and left in her place Erne, to keep him from despair. Erne, the delight of his life, the gentle, handsome lad, who had wound himself so round his heart. He could not take this money from Erne. It might be unjust, but it was so pleasant to think of Erne's having it.

Yet death was near, and might come at any time. And afterwards, — some justice must be done to George. Half, say. There was the will, and there was the fire, — and Erne, — and George —

* * * * *

The butler was awakened by a light, a sudden light, on his face, and a sound which seemed to him to be one of those terrible, inexplicable, horrible noises, which never occur in life, but which are sometimes heard towards the end of a very bad dream, — of one of those dreams from which the sleeper awakes himself by an effort, simply from terror of going on with it any further. Sir George was standing in the corridor before him, with a candle held close to his face, and a drawn sword in his hand, looking down the passage. The poor old gentleman's face was horribly distorted, and red; and, before the old butler had time to stagger to his feet, the noise which had awakened him came again. It was Sir George Hillyar's voice, for the butler saw him open his mouth; but the tone of it was more nearly like the ghastly screech of an epileptic than anything the old man had ever heard. He saw Sir George stand for an instant, pointing down the corridor with his sword, and crying out, "Reuben! Reuben! Help! Help! Come at once, and I will do justice to all. Reuben! Reuben!" And then he saw the poor old gentleman go staggering down the passage, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he followed him, very truly sorry for his kind old master, but reflecting, nevertheless, that all folks, high or low, must go off somehow, and hoping, even in the few minutes following, that his summons might come in a more peaceful manner. He saw clearly that Sir George had got his

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first stroke, and that he would never be the man he was any more.

"I hope he ain't altered his will," said the sleepy butler, a red-hot Erneist, to himself, as he followed poor reeling Sir George down the passage. "Poor, dear old master, I wonder if he really is ill or no. May be there ain't much the matter with him. I wish I dared collar him. Where is he going?"

Sir George, meanwhile, with his sword in his right hand, feeling the wall with his left, which held the candlestick, staggering fearfully from time to time, had passed from passage to passage, until he had come to the kitchen. Once or twice at first he had cried out, in that terrible tone we have noticed before, for Reuben, but latterly had been silent.

The terrified butler saw him enter the kitchen. The next instant there was a heavy fall, and, following his master in, he found darkness and silence. He cried out for help, but none came for a few moments; only a cat in the butler's pantry hard by knocked down some glasses, and tried to break out of the window in her terror. The silence was terrible. He shouted again, and this time roused the household. When lights were brought, they found Sir George lying on his face quite dead, with his sword and his candle thrown far from him in his fall.

When they had carried him up, the first thing the butler did was to send for old Morton, the keeper, who came at once.

"Dead!" he said; "he ain't dead, I tell you. Here, Sir George, sir, rouse up. I've seen him this way twenty times." He quite refused to believe it. He kept on at intervals speaking to the dead man. Sometimes he would give him his title; at others he would merely call him George. At one time he would be angry with him; at another he would almost whisper to him, and remind him of his dogs and his guns, and scenes which the closed eyes should never look on any more; but at last he did nothing but sit and moan wearily. No one dared interfere, until the new Sir George Hillyar came, and quietly and kindly led him away.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: MISS BROWN'S TROUBLES COME TO AN END, WHILE MR. ERNE HILLYAR'S FAIRLY COMMENCE.

WELLINGTON ROW, Kentish Town, is a row of semi-respectable houses, in the most dreary and commonplace of all the dreary and commonplace suburbs which lie in the north of London. I should suppose that the people who inhabit them may generally be suspected of having about a hundred a year, and may certainly be convicted, on the most overwhelming evidence, of only keeping one servant.

At least Mrs. Jackson, at No. 7, only kept one, and she was n't half strong enough for the place. Mrs. Jackson did n't mean to say that she was n't a willing girl enough, but she was a forgetful slut, who was always posturing, and running after the men, "and so at times it was 'ard to keep your temper with her; indeed it were, I do assure you."

Now the history of the matter is simply this. Martha Brown, the servant-of-all-work ("slavey," as a snob would so suggestively have called her), was a delicate and thoughtful girl, which things, of course, are serious delinquencies in a pot-scourer and door-step cleaner; but, beside and above these crimes, she had committed the crowning one of being most remarkably pretty,—which, of course, was not to be tolerated.

So she had rather a hard life of it, poor thing. Mrs. Jackson was not, on the whole, very kind to her; and, being a she-dragon, not well-favored herself, she kept such watch and ward over her pretty servant; accused her so often of flirtations which were entirely imaginary, and altogether did so wrangle, scold, and nag at her; that sometimes, in the cold winter's morning, wearily scrubbing the empty grate, or blowing with her lips the smouldering fire, the poor thing has bent down her head and wished that she was dead, and calmly asleep beside her mother in the country church-yard.

She was a country-bred girl, an orphan, who had come up to London to "better" herself (Lord help her!), had taken service in this dull, mean neighborhood, and was now fearful of moving from sheer terror of seeing new faces. And so here she had been, in this dreadful brick-and-mortar prison, for more than three years, rising each morning only to another day of dull drudgery of the lowest kind. Perhaps, sometimes, there might be a mo-

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ment or two for a day-dream of the old place she loved. But day-dreams are dangerous for a slave with a scolding mistress. The cat may get at the milk, the meat may burn; and then wrangle and nag for an hour or so, and, ah, me! it is all over —

> "She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade, —
> The mist and the river, the hill and the shade;
> The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
> And the colors have all passed away from her eyes."

What kept her up, you wonder! Only hope. And, — well! well! "People in that rank of life don't fall in love in the same way as we do," said a thoroughly good fellow to me the other day. I beg solemnly to assure him that he is quite mistaken.

Every time when anything went wrong with this poor little Cinderella, as soon as the first scalding tears were wiped, she had a way, learnt by long and bitter experience, of calling up a ghost of a smile on her poor face. She would say to herself, "Well, never mind. My holiday comes next Sunday three weeks."

I beg to apologize for telling one of the most beautiful stories ever written (that of Cinderella) over again in my clumsy language. But there are many thousand Cinderellas in London, and elsewhere in England, and you must ask Dr. Elliotson or Dr. Bucknill how many of them go mad every year.

And, as the monthly holiday approached, there would be such a fluttering of the poor little heart about the weather, — for it is quite impossible to look one's best if it rains, and one likes to look one's best, under certain circumstances, you know, — and such a stitching together of little bits of finery, that the kettle used to boil over sadly often, and unnoticed coals to fall into the dripping-pan, and wrap the meat in the wild splendors of a great conflagration; and there would be more scolding and more tears. However, all the scolding and all the tears in the world can't prevent Sunday morning from coming; and so it came. And this was a rather special Sunday morning, — for there was a new bonnet with blue ribbons, a rather neat thing; and so she was rather anxious for a fine day.

But it rained steadily and heavily. It was very provoking. The people were going into church, by the time she reached Clerkenwell Prison, and it still rained on: but what was worse than that, there was nobody there!

Up and down the poor child walked, under the gloomy prison wall, in the driving rain. It is not an inspirating place at any time, that Clerkenwell Prison-wall, as you will agree if you notice it the next time you go by. But, if you walk for an hour or more there, under a heavy disappointment, in a steady rain, waiting for some one who don't come, you will find more melancholy still.

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The people came out of church, and the street was empty once more. Then there were tears, but they were soon followed by sunshine. The spoilt bonnet was nothing now; the wet feet were forgotten; the wretched cheap boots, made of brown paper sewn together with rotten thread, the dreary squalor of the landscape, the impertinencies of passing snobs, were nothing now; — everything was as it should be. For there was the ring of an iron heel on the pavement, and the next minute a young fellow came hurling round the corner, and then —

Well! Nobody saw us do it but the policeman, and he was most discreet. He looked the other way. He had probably done the same thing himself often enough.

I had run all the way from Chelsea, and had almost given up all hopes of finding her; so, in the first flutter of our meeting, what between want of breath, and — say, pleasurable excitement — I did not find time to tell her that my news was bad: nay, more than bad — terrible. I had n't the heart to tell her at first, and when I had found the heart, I could n't find the courage. And so I put it off till after dinner. She and I dined at the same shop the last time we were in England, and oh! the profound amazement of the spirited proprietor at seeing a lady in thick silks and heavy bracelets come in to eat beef! We had to tell him all about it; we had, indeed.

At last it all came out, and she was sitting before me with a scared, wild face. My cousin Reuben and my father had been arrested, but my father immediately released. Sir George Hillyar was dead, and Joe's heart was broken.

"The grand old gentleman dead!"

"Yes. Got up in the night out of his chair, wandered as far as the kitchen, and fell dead!"

"How very dreadful, dear."

There was something more dreadful coming, however. I had to break it to her as well as I could. So I took her hand and held it, and said, —

"And now we are utterly ruined, and the forge fire is out."

"But it will be lit up again, dear. You and your father have your skill and strength left. You will light the forge fire again."

"Yes," I answered, "but it will be sixteen thousand miles away. In Australia, dear."

Now I had done it. She gave a low piteous moan, and then she nestled up close to me, and I heard her say, "Oh, I shall die! I know I shall die! I can't bear it without you, dear. I could n't have borne it so long if I had n't thought of you night and day. Oh, I hope I shall die. Ask your sister Emma to pray God to take me, dear."

"Why, you don't think I am going without you, do you?" I hurriedly asked.

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"You *must* go," she answered, crying.

"I know I must; and you must come too. Are you afraid?"

"How could I be afraid with you, darling. But you *must* go, and I must stay behind and die."

"Never mind about that, love. Are you afraid?"

"Not with you."

"Very well, then. You 'll have the goodness to get a recommendation from the parson, as an assisted emigrant, *at once*. If you can't, you must pay your passage, and that 'll be a twister. Now go home and give warning."

"I could n't do it, dear," she said, with her sweet, honest eyes beginning to sparkle through her tears, and her mouth beginning to form a smile.

"Could n't do what?"

"Give warning. I should fall down in a dead faint at her feet."

"Nonsense," I said. "Have it out the minute she opens the door."

"She won't open it. I go in the airy way, and as soon as she hears me come in she comes down and has a blow up at me."

"Can't you get in a wax, old girl?" I asked with an air of thoughtful sagacity, for I saw the difficulty at once.

Old girl thought this perfectly hopeless; and, indeed, I thought so too.

"Then I tell you what. Don't give her time to begin. Get between her and the door, and says you, 'If you please, ma'am, — if you please, ma'am, — I wish to give you a month's warning.'"

"Month's warning," repeated she.

"And then you take and hook it up stairs."

"Hook it up stairs," repeated she.

"You have n't got to *say* that to her. That 's what you 've got to *do*. When you come to the word 'warning,' say it out clear, and cut off."

At last, after many trials and repetitions, I got her to give me warning in a reasonably audible tone of voice; after which I saw her home. She made a mess of it after all, as I thought she would all along. She let the woman get between her and the door; and so had to stay and be scolded. But it "eventuated" rather well; for she *did* get into a "wax" for the first time in her life, and gave the woman as good as she brought. Astonished at her own suddenly acquired audacity, and perfectly unused to fighting, she committed the mistake, so common among young fighters, (who have never been thrashed, and therefore don't know the necessity of quarter,) of hitting too hard. The end of which was that she was turned out the next day for a nasty, impudent,

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careless, sleepy, aggravating, and ungrateful little audacious hussey; which was a grand success, — a piece of luck, which even I, with my highly sanguine temperament, had never dared to hope for.

While I was yet standing in the street, and making the remarkable discovery that I was wet through, and rather thinking that it must have been raining cats and dogs ever since I had been out, some one came and laid his hand upon my shoulder, and, looking up, I saw Erne Hillyar. He told me that he had come to find me, and then he told me something else, — something which made me sit down on a muddy door-step in the rain, and stare at him with blank amazement and horror.

Erne Hillyar was a homeless beggar.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LE ROI EST MORT, — VIVE LE ROI.

"I CANNOT conceal from you the fact, my dear Sir George Hillyar," said Mr. Compton, the morning after the funeral, "that your father's death at this moment is a very serious catastrophe, indeed."

"Very serious to me, I suppose?" said George.

"Very much so indeed. It is my belief that, if your father had lived another week, he would have altered his will in your favor."

"You are quite sure that he has not done so?"

"Quite sure. He would never have done it without my assistance."

"Do you hear that, you — you — Lady Hillyar?" said George, with a savage snarl, turning to Gerty, who was sitting nursing the baby.

She looked so very scared that old Compton interposed. "My dear Sir George, — now really, — her ladyship is not strong, —

"Silence, sir," replied George; "I am master here, and allow no one to interfere between me and my wife. Leave the room, Lady Hillyar, and ask your fellow-conspirator against your husband, — the gamekeeper's grandson, my worthy half-brother, — if he will be so condescending as to be so obliging as to come and hear this precious will, which he and the lawyer seem to have concocted between them, read out."

"Sir George, I will not be insulted; you will remove your papers to some other office."

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"Delighted, I am sure," said George, with an insolent sneer; for the old devil of temper was raging full career within him, and there was no help by. "It won't be worth much to any one. I shall insure this house over its value, and then burn the God-forgotten old place down. I don't care what I do."

"Sir George, for God's sake!" said Compton, shocked to see that the devil had broken loose once more after such a long sleep. "Suppose any one heard you, and there was a fire afterwards!"

"I don't care," said George, throwing himself into the chair in front of the escritoire, in which his father had sat the night before he died. "Oh, here is the noble Erne, who plots and conspires to rob his brother of his inheritance, and then sneaks night and day after my wife to prevent her getting the ear of my father."

"George, George, you are irritated; you don't mean what you say."

"Not mean it!"

"You can't, you know; you are a gentleman, and you can't accuse me of such a thing as that."

"I will! I do!" said George.

"Then I say that it is false. That is all. *I* do not wish to continue this discussion now; but it is false."

"False!" shouted George, rising and advancing towards Erne. "Is it false that I have sat watching you so many months, always interfering? Is it false that I have sat and cursed you from the bottom of my heart? Perhaps you will say it is false that I curse you now, — curse the day you were born, — curse the day that my father ever caught sight of your low-bred drab of a mother."

George had come too close, or had raised his hand, or something else, — no man knows how it began; but he had hardly uttered these last words when he and his brother were at one another's throats like tigers, and the two unhappy young men, locked together in their wicked struggle, were trying to bear one another down, and uttering those inarticulate sounds of fury which one hears at such times only, and which are so strangely brutelike.

Before Compton had time to cry "Murder" more than once, George was down, with his upper-lip cut open by a blow from Erne's great signet-ring. He rose up, pale with deadly hatred, and spoke. His wrath was so deep that cursing availed him nothing. He only said in a low voice, "I will never, never forgive that blow as long as I live. If I ever get a chance of returning it, remember it and tremble, Master Erne."

Erne had not had time to cool and get ashamed of himself yet. He merely returned his brother a look of fierce scorn.

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"Now," said George, "let us have this precious will read, and let me turn him out of the house; I shall have that satisfaction. Have you the will?"

"It is in here," said Mr. Compton. "This is the key of the escritoire. Sir George always kept it here, because he had a fancy that in some desperate extremity he might wish to put in a codicil in a hurry. We shall find it in this morocco box. God above us! What is this? Let me sit down: I am a very old man and can't stand these shocks. There is no will at all here!"

"No will?" said both of the brothers together.

"Not a vestige of one," replied Compton, looking suddenly up at George.

George laughed. "I have n't stolen it, old fox. If I had known where it was, I would have. In an instant. In a minute."

"I don't think you have taken it, Sir George," said Compton. "Your behavior would have been different, I think. But the will was here the day before Sir George died, I *know*, and it is not here now."

"Look! Search! Hunt everywhere, confound you!"

"I will do so. But I have a terrible fancy that your father destroyed this will, and was struck down before he had time to make another. I have a strong suspicion of it. This will has been here for ten years, and never moved. My opinion is that there is no will."

He made some sort of a search, — a search he knew to be hopeless, — while George stood and looked on with ghastly terror in his face. Erne had grown deadly pale, and was trembling. At last the search was over, and Compton, sitting down, burst into a violent fit of sobbing.

George spoke first. "Then," said he, in a voice which rattled in his throat, "everything is entirely and unreservedly mine?"

"I fear so."

"Every stick of timber, every head of game, every acre of land, every farthing of money, — all mine without dispute?"

"If we can find no will. And that we shall never do."

"You have heard what he has said," said George to Erne, wiping his mangled lips, "and you heard what I said just now. This house is mine. Go. I will never forget and never forgive. Go."

Erne turned on his heel, and went without a word. The last he remembers was seeing his brother stand looking at him with his face all bloody, scowling. And then he was out of the house into the sunshine, and all the past was a cloud to him.

God had punished him suddenly and swiftly. He very often does so with those He loves best.

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CHAPTER XXXVII,

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: ERNE'S NURSE.

"WILL God ever forgive me, Jim? I wish my right hand had been withered before I did it. I shall never forget that bleeding face any more. Oh, my brother! my brother! I would have loved you; and it has come to this!"

And so he stood moaning in the rain before me, in the blank, squalid street; and I sat on the step before him, stunned and stupid.

"I shall never be forgiven. Cain went out from the presence of the Lord. Look, his blood is on my right hand now! How could I? How could I?"

What could I say? I do not know even now what I ought to have said. I certainly did not then. I was very sorry at his having struck his brother, certainly; but seeing him stand homeless and wet in the rain was more terrible to me. I did not for one instant doubt that what he said was perfectly true, as indeed it was; and even then I began to ask of myself, What will become of him?

"Oh, father! father! I wish I was with you! I shall never join you now. He used to say that he would teach me to love my mother when we met her in heaven: but we can never meet now, — never — never!"

This last reflection seemed to my boy-mind so very terrible that I saw it was time to do or say something; and so I took his arm and said, —

"Come home, master, and sleep."

"Home! my old Jim? *I* have no home."

"As long as I have one you have one, Master Erne," I answered, and he let me take him away with me.

It was a weary walk. I had to tell him of our misfortunes, of our ruin, of Reuben's ruin, of Joe's terrible disappointment, and of the sad state of mind into which he had fallen, — of the cold forge, of the failing food. I had to tell him that the home I was asking him to share with me had nothing left to adorn it now but love; but that we could give him that still. It eased his heart to hear of this. Once or twice he said, "If I had only known!" or "Poor Reuben!" And, when I saw that he was quieter, I told him about our plans; and as I did so, I saw that he listened with a startled interest.

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I told him that Mr. Compton had advanced money to take us all to Cooksland, and that we went in a month, or less; and so I went on, thinking that I had interested him into forgetting his brother for a time. But, just as we turned into Church Street, he said:—

"*She* must never know it. I shall die if she knows it. I shall go mad if she knows it."

"What?"

"Emma must never know that I struck my brother; remember that."

I most willingly agreed, and we went in.

The dear comfortable old place was nearly dismantled, but there was the same old hearth, still warm. Our extreme poverty was, so to speak, over, but it had left its traces behind still. My father looked sadly grave; and as for my mother, though sitting still,—as her wont was on Sunday,—I saw her eye rambling round the room sometimes, in sad speculation over lost furniture. As I came in I detected her in missing the walnut secretary, at which my father used to sit and make up his accounts. She apologized to me also silently, with only her eyes, and I went and kissed her. A great deal may pass between two people, who understand one another, without speaking.

Emma was sitting in the centre of the children, telling them a story; and she came smiling towards Erne, holding out her hand. And when he saw her he loved so truly, he forgot us all; and, keeping his head away from her, he said: "No! no! not that hand. That one is—I have hurt it. You must never take that hand again, Emma. It 's bloody."

I, foreseeing that he would say too much, came up, took his hand, and put it into hers. But when she saw his face,—saw his pale scared look,—she grew pale herself, and dropped his hand suddenly. And then, putting together his wild appearance, and the words he had just used, she grew frightened, and went back with a terrified look in her face, without one word, and gathered all the children around her as if for protection.

"You see even she flies from me. Let me go out and hide my shame elsewhere. I am not fit for the company of these innocent children. I had better go."

This was said in a low tone apart to me. My affection for him showed me that the events of the morning had been too heavy a blow for him, and that, to all intents and purposes, poor Erne was mad. There was an ugly resolute stare in the great steel-blue eyes which I had never seen before, and which I hope never to see again. I was terrified at the idea of his going out in his present state. He would only madden himself further; he was wet and shivering now, and the rain still came down steadily. I could see no end to it.

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"Come up to sleep, Master Erne."

"Sleep! and dream of George's bloody face? Not I. Let me go, old boy."

"Please don't go out, sir," said I louder, casting a hurried look of entreaty to Emma, who could hear nothing, but was wondering what was the matter, "It will be your death."

"Yes, that is what I want. Let me go."

"Won't Freddy go and kiss his pretty Master Erne?" said Emma's soft voice, suddenly and hurriedly. "Won't Freddy go and look at his pretty watch? Run then, Fred, and kiss him."

Thus enjoined, Fred launched himself upon Erne, and clasped his knee. It was with an anxious heart that I raised him up, and put him into Erne's arms. It was an experiment.

But it was successful. The child got his arm round his neck, and his little fingers twined in his hair; and, as I watched Erne, I saw the stare go out of his eyes, and his face grow quieter and quieter until the tears began to fall; and then, thinking very properly that I could not mend matters, I left Erne alone with the child and with God.

I went and thanked Emma for her timely tact, and put her in possession of the whole case; and then, finding Erne quiet, I made Fred lead him up to bed. It was high time, for he was very ill, and before night was delirious.

My mother gave herself up to a kind of calm despair when she saw what had happened, and that Erne would be an inmate of the house for some time, and that of necessity Emma must help to nurse him. She spoke to me about it, and said that she supposed God knew best, and that was the only comfort she had in the matter.

In his delirium he was never quiet unless either she or I were at his side. For five days he was thus. The cold he had caught, and the shock of excitement he had sustained, had gone near to kill him; but it was his first illness, and he fought through it, and began to mend.

My mother never said one word of caution to Emma. She knew it would be useless. The constant proximity to Erne must have been too much for any efforts which Emma might have made against her passion. *I* was glad of it. My father merely went gravely about his work; was as respectful and attentive to Erne as ever; while my mother had, as I said before, resigned herself to despair, and left the whole matter in the hands of God.

Poor Joe! His was a bitter disappointment. Secretary to a member of Parliament: and now,—Joe Burton, the hump-backed son of the Chelsea blacksmith; all his fine ambition scattered to the winds. He sat silently brooding now for hours; for

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a week I think he scarcely spoke. Sometimes he would rouse himself, and help at what there was to do, as a matter of duty; but as soon as he could he sat down again, and began eating his heart once more.

I need not say that we were all very gentle and careful with him. We had somehow got the notion that all our sufferings were as nothing to poor Joe's. I wonder who put that notion afloat. I wonder whether Joe unconsciously did so himself, by his tacit assumption that such was the case. I think it very likely. But Joe was never for an instant selfish or morose; unless his want of cheerfulness was selfish. He certainly might have assisted at that family harmony I spoke of; but then he was at Stanlake while we were learning the tune at home.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SIR GEORGE HILLYAR IS WITNESS FOR CHARACTER.

And dark over head all the while hung the approaching cloud. Reuben, Sykes, and the rest of them had been remanded, and the day drew nigh when Reuben would be committed for trial.

The question was, How far was he really complicated with Sykes and the gang? That he took his father in, and lodged him, and hid him, could not go very far against him: nay, would even stand in his favor. Then his character was undeniably good until quite lately. And, thirdly and lastly, he had been absent at Stanlake for a long while. These were the strong points in his favor. Nevertheless, since his father had made his most unfortunate appearance, there was very little doubt that Reuben had been seen very often in the most lamentably bad company. It was hard to say how it would go.

At last the day came on. I was the only one of the family who went, and I left laughing, promising to bring Reuben home to dinner; but still I was very anxious, and had tried to make up my mind for the very worst. There was a considerable crowd in the police-court; and, as I was trying to elbow my way as far forward as I could, to hear what case was on, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and looking round, saw Sir George Hillyar.

"Come out of court with me," he said; "I wish to speak with you. The case will not be on this half-hour."

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I wondered why he should care so much about it; but I obeyed, and we went out together, and walked to a quiet spot.

"What is your opinion about this matter? What do his associates say, — these thieves and prostitutes among whom he has been brought up? What do they say about his chance?"

He said this with such fierce eagerness that I swallowed the implied insult and answered, —

"Six and half-a-dozen, sir. I know him to be innocent, but who is to prove him so?"

"Why did not your father prevent this?" he went on, in a milder tone. "Why did not *you* prevent it? Your father is a man of high character. Why did he not take care of this poor deserted orphan? Christian charity should have made him do so."

"Nobody could have gone on better than Reuben, sir," I answered, "until his father came back three months ago."

I was looking at him as I said this, and I saw that he grew from his natural pallor to a ghastly white.

"Say that again."

"Until his father came back some three months ago, — his father, Samuel Burton, who, I have heard say, was valet to your honor."

"Treacherous dog!" I heard him say to himself. And then aloud, "I suppose you do not know where this man Burton is, do you?"

"That is not very likely, sir, seeing that he was the leader in that very business for which poor Reuben has been took."

"Come," he said; "let us go back. Bring Reuben to me after it is all over."

When we got in again the case was on. It seemed so very sad and strange to me, I remember, to see poor Reuben in the dock; the moment I saw him there, I gave him up for lost. It appeared that a grand system of robbery had been going on for some time by a gang of men, some of whom were in the dock at present, — that their head-quarters had been at a house in Lawrence Street, kept by an Irish woman, Flanagan, now in custody, and a woman Bardolph, *alias* Tearsheet, *alias* Hobart Town Sall, still at large, and in a garret at the top of the house known as Church Place, which was occupied by the prisoner Burton. The leader of the gang had been one Samuel Burton, *alias* Sydney Sam, not in custody; the father of the prisoner Burton. The principal depot for the stolen goods appeared to have been in Lawrence Street (I thought of the loose boards, and trembled), for none had been found at Church Place, which seemed more to have been used as a lurking-place, — the character of James Burton, the blacksmith, the occupier of the house, standing high enough to disarm suspicion. The prisoner Sykes,

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a desperate and notorious burglar and ruffian, had been convicted *x* times; the prisoners Nym, Bardolph, and Pistol *y* times. There was no previous conviction against the prisoner Burton.

The other prisoners reserved their defence; but Mr. Compton had procured for Reuben a small Jew gentleman, who now politely requested that Reuben might be immediately discharged from custody.

On what grounds the worthy magistrate would be glad to know.

"On the grounds," burst out the little Jew gentleman, with blazing eyes and writhing lips, "that his sole and only indiscretion was to give shelter, and house-room, and food, and hiding, to his own father; when that father came back, at the risk of his life, sixteen thousand miles, to set eyes on his handsome lad again once more before he died, — came back to him a miserable, broken, ruined, desperate old convict. He ought not to have received him, you say. I allow it. It was grossly indiscreet for him to have shared his bed and his board with his poor old father. But it was not criminal. I defy you to twist the law of the land to such an extent as to make it criminal. I defy you to keep my client in that dock another ten minutes."

The people in the court tried a cheer, but I was afraid of irritating the magistrate, and turned round saying, "Hush! Hush!" and then I saw that Sir George Hillyar was gone from beside me.

"The old fault, Mr. Marks," said the quiet, good-natured magistrate to Reuben's frantic little Jew gentleman. "Starting well and then going too far. If I had any temper left after twenty years on this bench, I should have answered your defence by sending your client for trial. However, I have no temper; and, therefore, if you can call a respectable witness to character, I think that your client may be discharged."

The little Jew gentleman was evidently puzzled here. His witnesses — I was one — were all to prove that Reuben had not been at home for the last two months. As for witnesses to character, I imagine that he thought the less that was said about that the better. However, a Jew is never nonplussed (unless one Jew bowls down another's wicket, as in the case of Jacob and Esau); and so the little Jew lawyer erected himself on his tip-toes, and, to my immense admiration, and to the magistrate's infinite amusement, called out promptly, with a degree of impudence I never saw equalled, one of the greatest names in Chelsea.

There was subdued laughter all through the court. "The gravity of the bench was visibly disturbed," said the gentlemen of the flying pencils. But, before the rustle of laughter was subdued, our brave little Jew was on tip-toe again, with a scrap of paper in his hand, shouting out another name.

"Sir George Hillyar."

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Sir George Hillyar, at the invitation of the worthy magistrate, walked quietly up and took his seat on the bench. He was understood to say, "I am a magistrate in the colony of Cooksland, and still hold my appointment as Inspector of Police for the Bumbleoora district. The wretched man, Samuel Burton, whose name has been mentioned as leader of this gang of thieves, was once my valet. He robbed my late father, and was transported. The young man, Burton, the prisoner, his son, is a most blameless and excellent young man, whose character is, in my opinion, beyond all suspicion. He was a great favorite with my late father; and I am much interested in his welfare myself. Beyond the criminal indiscretion of saving the man he calls his father from starvation, I doubt if there is anything which can be brought against him."

This clenched the business. Reuben was discharged, while the others were sent for trial. I was mad with joy, and fought my way out through the crowd to the little door by which I thought Reuben would come. I waited some time. First came out the little Jew gentleman, in a state of complacency, working his eyebrows up and down, and sucking his teeth. After him, by a long interval, Sir George Hillyar; whom I took the liberty to thank. But no Reuben.

Sir George stayed with me, and said he would wait till the young man came out. We waited some time, and during that time we talked.

"I suppose," said Sir George, "that Mr. Erne Hillyar has been to see you."

I told him that Erne had come to us on the evening next after the funeral, — that he had been seized with a fever, had been at death's door, and was now getting slowly better.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that he is a penniless beggar?"

"We know that he has no money, Sir George; and we know that he will never ask you for any," said I, like a fool, in my pride for Erne.

"Well, then, I don't know that we need talk much about him. If you are nursing him and taking care of him on the speculation of my ever relenting towards him, you are doing a very silly thing. If you are, as I suspect, doing it for love, I admire you for it; but I swear to God, that, as far as I am concerned, you shall have no reward, further than the consciousness of doing a good action. He is quite unworthy of you. Is he going to die?"

"No."

"Then he will marry your sister. And a devilish bad bargain she will make of it. I wonder where Reuben is."

"He must come soon, sir."

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"I suppose so. I wish he would make haste. Mind you, you young blacksmith, I am not a good person myself, but I know there are such things; and Compton says that you Burtons are good. I have no objection. But I warn you not to be taken in by Mr. Erne Hillyar, for of all the specious, handsome young dogs who ever walked the earth he is the worst. I wonder where Reuben can be."

It was time to see. I was getting anxious to fight Erne's battle with his brother; but what can a blacksmith do with a baronet, without preparation? I gave it up on this occasion, and went in to ask about Reuben.

I soon got my answer; Reuben had gone, twenty minutes before, by another door; we had missed him.

"He has gone home, sir, to our place," I said to Sir George; and so I parted from him. And, if you were to put me on the rack, I could not tell you whether I loved him or hated him. *You* will hate him, because I have only been able to give his words. But his manner very nearly counterbalanced his words. Every sentence was spoken with a weary, worn effort; sometimes his voice would grow into a wrathful snarl, and it would then subside once more into the low, dreamy, distinct tone, in which he almost always spoke. I began to understand how he won his beautiful wife. A little attentive animation thrown into that cynically quiet manner of his — coming, too, from a man who, by his calm, contemptuous bearing, gave one, in spite of one's common sense, the notion that he was socially and intellectually miles above one — would be one of the highest compliments that any woman could receive.

But when I got home, no Reuben was there. He did not come home that night, nor next day, nor for many days. Sir George Hillyar sent for me, and I had to tell him the fact. "He is ashamed to see my father after what has happened," I said. And Sir George said it was very vexing, but he supposed it must be so. Still, days went on, and we heard nothing of him whatever.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNCLE BOB SURPRISES ERNE.

THERE is very little doubt that Emma would have done her duty better had she kept away from Erne altogether. It would have been fairer to him. She had prayed hard to my mother to be allowed a little, only a little more, of him, and my mother had, very wisely, refused it. Now Providence had given him back to her, — had put the cup to her lips, as it were; and she, knowing her own strength, — knowing by instinct that she had power to stop when she pleased, and knowing also that, even if her own strength failed, the cup would be taken from her in a very few days, — had drunk deeply. She had utterly given herself up to the pleasure of his presence, to the delight of to-day, refusing to see that the morrow of her own making must dawn sooner or later.

My mother and I thought that it was all over and done, and that there was no good in trying to stop matters in any way; and we were so far right. My mother would gladly have stopped it; but what could she do? — circumstances were so much against her. Busy as she was, morning and night, she must either have left Erne, during his recovery, to take care of himself, or leave him and Emma alone a great deal together. She, as I said before, abandoned the whole business in despair. I was intensely anxious for the whole thing to go on; I saw no trouble in the way. I thought that Emma's often-expressed determination of devoting her whole life to poor Joe was merely a hastily-formed resolution, a rather absurd resolution, which a week in Erne's company would send to the winds. I encouraged their being together in every way. I knew they loved one another: therefore, I argued, they ought to make a match of it. That is all *I* had to say on the subject.

"God send us well out of it," said my mother to me one night.

"Why?" I answered. "It's all right."

"All right?" she retorted. "Sitting in the window together all the afternoon, with their hair touching; — all right! Lord forgive you for a booby, Jim!"

"Well!" I said, "what of that? — Martha and me sat so an hour yesterday, and you sat and see us. Now, then!"

"You and Martha ain't Erne and Emma," said my mother oracularly.

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"You don't look me in the face, mother, and say that you distrust Erne?"

"Bless his handsome face, — no!" said my mother, with sudden animation. "He is as true as steel, — a sunbeam in the house. But, nevertheless, what I say is, Lord send us well out of it!"

I acquiesced in that prayer, though possibly in a different sense.

"You have power over her," resumed my mother. "You are the only one that has any power over her. Why don't you get her away from him?"

This I most positively refused to do.

"You'd better," said my mother, "unless you want her heart broke." And so she left me.

"Hammersmith, I want you," called out Erne, now almost convalescent, a short time afterwards; "I want you to come out with me. I want you to give me your arm, and help me as far as Kensington."

I agreed after a time, for he was hardly well enough yet. But he insisted that the business was important and urgent, and so we went. And, as we walked, he talked to me about his future prospects.

"You see, old boy, I haven't got a brass farthing in the world. I have nothing but the clothes and books you brought from Stanlake. And, — I am not wicked: I forgive anything there may be to forgive, as I hope to be forgiven, — but I could n't take money from him."

I thought it my duty, now he was so much stronger, honestly to repeat the conversation Sir George had held with me, on the day when Reuben was discharged from custody.

"That is his temper, is it?" said Erne. "Well, God forgive him! To resume: do you see, I am hopelessly penniless."

I was forced to see that. I had my own plan, though I could not broach it.

"In the middle of which," said Erne, "comes this letter. Read it."

"My dear Nephew, Mr. Erne: — From a generous communication received from the new and highly-respected bart., in which my present munificent allowance is continued, I gather that differences, to which I will not further allude, have arisen between yourself and a worthy bart. whom it is unnecessary to mention by name. Unless I am misinformed this temporary estrangement is combined with, if not in a great degree the cause of, pecuniary embarrassments. Under these circumstances, I beg to call your attention to the fact that I have now

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been living for many years on the bounty of your late father, and have saved a considerable sum of money. In case £500 would be of any use to you, I should rejoice in your acceptance thereof. I *owe* your late father more than that, as a mere matter of business. If agreeable to the feelings of all parties, a personal interview is requested.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"ROBERT HAWKINS."

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"I think very well of your uncle, and I should take the money."

"I *must*. But think of my disreputable old uncle turning up at such a time as this. Do you know my father was always fond of him? I wonder what he is like! I have never seen him."

"Did n't you tell me he drank, sir?" I asked.

"Drink!" said Erne. "He has been drunk nineteen years."

I was lost in the contemplation of such a gigantic spree, and was mentally comparing the case of Erne's Uncle Bob with that of a young lady in Cambridgeshire, who had at that time, according to the Sunday papers, an ugly trick of sleeping for six or seven months at a stretch, and thinking what a pity it was that two such remarkable characters did n't make a match of it and live in a caravan; moreover, supposing them to have any family, what the propensities of that family would be, — whether they would take to the drinking or to the sleeping, or to both, — concluding, that whichever they did, they would be most valuable properties; in short, rambling on like my mother's own son: when we came to the house in Kensington, and were immediately admitted into the presence.

This mysterious Uncle Bob was a vast, square-shouldered, deep-chested giant of a man, who was even now, sodden with liquor as he was, really handsome. Erne had often told me that his mother had been very beautiful. Looking at this poor, lost, deboshed dog of a fellow, I could readily understand it. Erne said he had been drunk nineteen years; if he had n't told me that, I should have guessed five-and-twenty.

Never having had any wits, he had not destroyed them by drinking; and having, I suppose, wound himself up for the interview by brandy or something else, he certainly acted as sensibly as could have been expected of him twenty years before. Besides, God had given this poor drunkard a kind heart; and certainly, with all his libations, he had not managed to wash *that* away. In our Father's house there are many mansions; I wonder if there is one for him!

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At the time of his sister's marriage, he had just been raised to the dignity of underkeeper. Life had ceased with the poor fellow then. He was of an old family, and the old rule, that the women of a family last two generations longer than the men, was proved true here. He had shown signs of the family decadence while his sister showed none. She was vigorous, beautiful, and vivacious. He was also handsome, but unenergetic, with a tendency to bad legs, and a dislike for female society and public worship. Drink had come as a sort of revelation to him. He had got drunk, so to speak, on the spot, and had stayed so. His life had ceased just as he was raised to the dignity of cleaning Sir George Hillyar's first season guns, nineteen years before; and we found him sitting before the fire, rubbing one of those very guns with a leather on this very afternoon.

He rose when we went in, and made a low bow to Erne, and then stood looking at him a few seconds. "You are very like your mother, sir," he said gently; "very like."

"My dear Uncle Bob," said Erne, "I am come according to appointment to speak to you about the noble and generous offer of yours."

"Do you accept it, sir?"

"I do most thankfully, my dear uncle. I would speak of it as a loan, but how can I dare do so? I have been brought up in useless luxury. I know nothing."

"You 'll get on, sir. You 'll get on fast enough," said the poor fellow, cheerfully. "Please come and see me sometimes, sir. You 're like my sister, sir. It does me good to hear your voice. Hers was a very pleasant one. We had a happy home of it in the old lodge, sir, before Sir George came and took her away. *I* saw what had happened the night he came into our lodge, after eight o'clock, and stood there asking questions, and staring at her with his lip a-trembling. *I* saw. I did n't think, — let 's see: I was talking about——. Ah! Sam Burton knowing what he knew and not trading on it, — no, not that, — I mean I hope you 'll come and see me sometimes. If my head was to get clear, as it does at times, I could tell you all sorts of things."

"My dear uncle, there is but small chance of our meeting for years. I am going to Australia."

"To Australia!" I bounced out, speaking for the first time.

"Certainly," said Erne; "I can do nothing here. And, besides," he added, turning his radiant face on mine, "I found something out last night."

Poor Uncle Bob gave Erne a pocket-book, and, after many affectionate farewells, we departed. I was very thoughtful all the way home. "Found something out last night!" Could it be all as I wished?

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CHAPTER XL.

THE LAST OF THE CHURCH-YARD.

"And so it is really true that the ship sails this day week, Emma?" said Erne Hillyar to Emma Burton, laughing. "Matters are coming to a crisis now, hey?"

"Yes, they are coming to a crisis," said Emma, quietly. "Only one week more."

"Only one week more of old England," said Erne, "and then four months of wandering waves."

"It will soon be over," said Emma.

"Oh, very soon," said Erne. "They tell me that the voyage passes like a peaceful dream. There are some who sail and sail on the sea for very sailing's sake, and would sail on forever. The old Greeks feared and wearied of the sea. We English love it as our mother. Yes, I think there are some of us who would love to live at sea."

"They leave their cares on shore," said Emma.

"They are like you and me, Emma. They have no cares."

"Have we none?"

"I have none. I leave everything humbly in the hands of God. I have been a great sinner, but He has forgiven me. He has been very merciful, Emma."

"I hope He will have mercy. I hope He will lay no burden on any of us greater than we can bear. But, at all events, they say that duty and diligence will carry one through all."

"You are disturbed and anxious, Emma, at this breaking up of old associations. Come with me. Let us walk together down to the old church-yard: it will be the last time for many years, — possibly forever."

"Yes, I will come with you. It will be for the last time forever. Let us come."

So they two went down together to the old church-yard, and stood in the old place together, looking over the low wall on to the river. The summer evening was gathering glory before it slept and became night. And beyond the bridge, westward, the water and the air above were one indistinguishable blaze of crimson splendor. At their feet the tide was rushing and swirling down to the sea.

They were quite alone, — in perfect solitude among the tombs. Erne was standing, as of old, on the grave of the Hillyar girl,

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so often mentioned before; and Emma was beside him, touching him, but looking away across the sweeping river.

And so they stood silent for a long while. How long? Who measures lovers' time? Who can say? But the sun was dead, and only a few golden spangles of cloud were blazing high aloft in the west, when Emma felt that Erne had turned, and was looking at her. And then her heart beat fast, and she wished she was dead, and it was all over. And she heard him say, with his breath on her cheek, —

"What beautiful hair you have!"

"Yes."

"Here is a long tress fallen down over your shoulder. May I loop it up?"

"Yes."

"May I kiss you?"

"Yes; it will soon be over."

"My darling, — my own beautiful bird!"

There was no answer to this, but a short sob, which was followed by silence. Then Erne drew her closer to him, and spoke in that low, murmuring whisper which Adam invented one morning in Eden.

"Why have we deferred this happy hour so long, Emma? How long have we loved one another? From the very beginning?"

"Yes, I think it was from the very beginning."

"Are you happy?"

"Quite happy. Are you happy, dear?"

"Surely, my own," said Erne. "Why should I not be?"

"Then let us be happy this one week, Erne. It is not long. God surely will not begrudge us one week; life is very long."

So they stood and talked till dusk grew into darkness upon the poor cripple-girl's grave. And she lay peacefully asleep, nor turned upon her bed, nor rose up in her grave-clothes, to scare her kinsman from his danger.

The next day was dark and wild, and he was up and away early, to take the last headlong step. His friend, James Burton, went with him, and Erne took passage in the same ship by which the Burtons were going.

It was a busy, happy day. There were many things for Erne to buy, of which he knew nothing, and his humble friend had to assist him in fifty ways. At intervals of business Erne found time to tell Jim everything, and that worthy lad was made thoroughly happy by the news. They were together all day in the driving rain, scarcely noticing that it blew hard till they got on board ship, and then they heard it moaning melancholy aloft among the spars and cordage, telling of wild weather on the distant sea.

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At evening it held up; and Erne, coming home, missed Emma, and followed her down to the church-yard. It was a very different evening from the last: low clouds were hurrying swiftly along overhead, and far in the westward a golden bar, scarcely above the horizon, showed where the sun was setting; and, as they looked at it, grew dark once more.

"Emma, my love, it is done."

"What is done?"

"I have taken passage in the same ship with you."

Was it a moan or a cry that she gave? Did it mean joy, or sorrow, or terror? He soon knew, although it was too dark to see her face.

"Don't kill me, Erne, by saying that! Don't tell me that you 've been such a madman!"

"My darling, what do you mean?"

"Keep your hand from me, Erne. Do not kiss me. Do not come near me."

"Emma, what is the matter?"

"It is not too late, Erne," she said, kneeling down on the wet tombstone. "If you ever loved me, — if you have any mercy on me, or on yourself, — don't carry out this intention."

"In Heaven's name why, my love?"

"If I had not thought that we were to part for ever and ever, inexorably, at the end of this week, I could have stopped you in a thousand ways. But I thought that surely I might have one single week of happiness with you, before we parted never to meet again."

"Why are we to part?"

"I have devoted my whole life to one single object, and nothing must ever interfere with it. I have made a solemn vow before heaven that nothing ever shall. I allowed myself to love you before I knew the full importance of that object. Even in the old times I saw that I must give you up for duty; and lately that duty has become ten times more imperative than ever. Judge what hope there is for us."

Erne stood silent a moment.

"Speak to me! Curse me! Don't stand silent! I know well how wicked I have been, but think of my punishment ——"

"Hush! my darling. You are only dearer to me than ever. Hush! and come here, once more — for the last time if you will, but come."

"Only for one moment. Will you do as I ask you? You will not come with us?"

"I will see. I want to ask you something. Did you think that I was going to part from you at the week's end as if nothing had passed? Could you think so of me? Were you mad, my own?"

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"Yes, I was mad, — wicked and mad. I did not know, I did not think. I *would* not think."

"And do you think I can give you up so lightly now? I *will* not. I swear it, — will not."

He felt her tremble on his arm, but she said quietly, "You must let me go. We must never talk to one another like this again. It is all my fault, I know, I have no one to blame but my wicked self. Good-bye, Erne."

"If you choose to carry out your resolution, you shall do so; but I will be by your side. I will never leave you. I will follow you everywhere. I will wait as long as you will, but I will never give you up."

"God's will be done," she said. "If you will make my trial harder, I can only say that I have deserved it. We must come home, Mr. Hillyar."

"Emma!"

"I have called you Erne for the last time," she said, and walked on.

That night the poor girl lay sobbing wildly in bed, hour after hour, — not the less wildly because she tried to subdue her sobs for fear of awakening her sleeping little bedfellow, Fred. Shame at the license she had allowed Erne, meaning as she did to part with him; remorse for the pain she had inflicted on him; blind terror for the future; and, above all, an obstinate adherence to her resolution, which her own heart told her nothing could ever shake, — these four passions — sometimes separately, sometimes combined — tore her poor little heart so terribly, that she hoped it was going to burst, and leave her at rest.

In the middle of the night, in one of the lulls between her gusts of passion, — lulls which, by God's mercy, were becoming more and more frequent; when the wild wind outside had died into stillness, and the whole house was quiet; when there was no sound except the gentle breathing of the child by her side, and no movement except its breath upon her cheek, — at such time the door was opened, and some one came in with a light. She looked round and said, —

"Mother!"

The big, hard-featured blacksmith's wife came to the bedside, and sat upon it, drawing her daughter to her bosom. She said, "Emma dear, tell mother all about it."

"Kiss me then, mother, and tell me I am forgiven."

"You know you are forgiven, my daughter."

"I never meant to have him, mother. I always loved him; you know that; but I had vowed my life to poor Joe, before ever I saw him. You know you told me to give him up, and I did. I only asked for one more day of him; you remember that."

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"And I forbade it."

"You were right and wise, dear. But then he came here in his trouble; and then, dear," she continued, turning her innocent, beautiful face up to her mother's, "I loved him dearer than ever."

"I know that, of course. I don't know what I could have done. Go on, and tell me what has happened now."

"Why, knowing that we were to part forever at the end of the week"— here her voice sank to a whisper — "I let him tell me he loved me; and I told him I loved him. Oh, my God! I only wanted one week of him, — one week out of all the weary, long eternity. Was that so very wicked?"

"You have been wrong, my darling; you have been very, very wrong. You must go on to the end; you must tell me what happened to-night."

"To-night? To-night? In the church-yard? Yes, I can tell you what happened there well enough. I am not likely to forget that. He told me that, so far from our being separated forever, he had taken passage in the same ship with us, and was going to follow me to the world's end."

"And what did you do?"

"I knelt and asked his forgiveness, and then cast him off forever."

Poor Mrs. Burton sank on her knees on the floor, and looked up into her daughter's face.

"Emma! Emma! Can you forgive your wicked old mother?"

"Forgive *you!* I, who have dragged our good name through the dust! I, who have let a man I never meant to marry kiss my cheek! *I* forgive you?"

"Yes, my poor innocent angel, — for so you are, — your poor old mother asks your forgiveness on her knees. I might have prevented all this. I broke it off once, as you remember; but when he came back, I let it all go on, just as if I was n't responsible. I thought it was Providence had sent him back. I thought I saw God's hand in it."

"God's hand *is* in it," said Emma.

"And Jim was so fierce about it; and I am so afraid of Jim. He wants you to marry Erne; and I thought it might be for the best; but I see other things now. Are you afraid of Jim?"

"Yes; what will he say about this?" said Emma.

"He will be very angry. He must never know."

"Erne will tell him."

"Is there no chance of your relenting about Erne Hillyar?' said Mrs. Burton, in a whisper.

"You know me, mother, and you know there is none; I should drag him down."

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"Then you must go on with your duty, my child. If you die, dear, — if God takes you to his bosom, and lets you rest there, — you must go on with your duty. Emma, I will give you strength. He would never be happy with you for long, unless he lowered himself to our level; and would you wish him to do that? He is one to rise in the world, and we, with our coarse manners and our poverty, would only be a clog round his neck. I love him for loving you; but remember what he is, and think what a partner he should have. You see your duty to him and to Joe. If the waves of the great, cruel sea we are going to cross rise up and whelm us, let your last thought before your death be that you had been true to duty."

CHAPTER XLI.

EMMA'S WORK BEGINS TO BE CUT OUT FOR HER.

It was the next night after her parting with Erne in the church-yard that poor Emma's ministrations began.

It had been a weary day for her. She had tried hard to lose thought in work, but she had succeeded but poorly even in the midst of the bustle of preparation; and now, when she was sitting alone in the silent room, with Joe moping and brooding, with his head on his hands, before her, — refusing to speak, refusing to go to bed, — her trouble came on her stronger than ever; and, with a feeling nearly like despair, she recalled the happy happy hour she had passed with Erne in the church-yard only two days ago, and saw before her, in the person of poor Joe, brooding sullenly over the dying fire, her life's work, — the hideous fate to which she had condemned herself in her fanaticism.

Erne and Jim had come in twice that day. They both looked very sad, and only spoke commonplaces to her. She saw that Erne had told Jim everything, and she trembled. But, Jim and she being left alone for one moment, Jim had come solemnly up and kissed her; and then she had suddenly cast her arms round his neck, and blessed him, in God's name, for not being angry with her. He had kissed her again sadly, and left her.

And now the work was all done, and the children were in bed; and she would gladly have been in bed too, with Fred's balmy child's breath fanning her to sleep. But there was poor Joe brooding with his head in his hands.

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At last he looked up. "Emma, my love," he said gently, "go to bed, dear. You are tired."

"To bed," she said, "my old Joe; why, it 's only half past nine. Here 's ever so much to do to these old shirts of Jim's; burnt all into holes in the arms with the forge sparks, just like father's. And Martha, she 's put the children to bed. I don't think I shall go to bed for another hour, bless you. Let 's sit and talk."

"I wish I was in my grave," said Joe. "I wish I had killed myself when I fell off that ladder."

"Why, dear?" said Emma, looking at him earnestly.

"Because I am shipwrecked and lost. God has only allowed me to exist hitherto because I developed the beautiful unselfish love of my brothers and sisters. Why, you all love me as well as if I was not the loathsome object I am."

"Joe, how dare you! I will not have it! You know you are not loathsome; and who knows better than yourself that your abilities are first-rate?"

"Ay! ay!" said Joe. "But a man with my hideous affliction don't get two such chances. *I* know. People like looking on handsome and beautiful things, if they can. No man would have such an unhappy monster as I am near him, if he could have something in the shape of a human being. I don't blame them. I don't rebel against God. I only know that my career is over."

"Joe! Joe! what are you talking of? Why, Joe, you have a head like Lord Byron's. Who knows better than Erne Hillyar? You are the handsomest of the family, in spite of your poor dear back."

"I love you and Jim the better for flattering me; but my eyes are opened."

"Have you fallen in love with any one? Come, tell your own sister. Let her share your trouble, Joe."

"No, it 's not that I was thinking of. I don't care for any woman but you. That Mrs. George Hillyar, Lady Hillyar, I should say —"

"Have you fallen in love with *her*, dear?" said Emma eagerly.

"Curse her! I hate her, the frivolous idiot. She gave me the bitterest insult I have ever had. When I first went there, I came suddenly on her in the library, and she ran away screaming, and locked herself in the nursery with the baby."

"I should like to knock her silly little head off her impudent little shoulders," said Emma with a bounce, stitching away at Jim's shirt, as if each click of the needle was a dig into poor Gerty's eyes. "But come, Joe, that ain't what 's the matter. What 's the matter is this. You thought you were going to be a great public man, and so on; and you 've had a temporary disappointment. Only don't go and look me in the face, and tell me

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that your personal appearance is going to begin to trouble you at this time of day; because, if you do, I shan't believe you. And, as for Lady Hillyar, she may be a very good judge of blacks (among whom she has been brought up, and has apparently copied her manners); but she is none of white, or she would n't have married that most ill-looking gentleman, Sir George. I say, Joe, dear."

"Well, Em," said Joe, with something like a laugh.

"Is there any parliament in Cooksland now," said Emma.

"Yes," said Joe, getting interested at once. "Yes, two Houses. Council, sixteen members, nominated by the Crown for life; Lower House or Assembly, thirty members, elected by universal suffrage of tax-payers. Property qualification, 300 acres under cultivation, or £2,000."

"Then there you are. What is to hinder *you* from a career? Lord bless me! why, it seems to me that you have made a change for the better. Career indeed!" And so she went on for half an hour, getting from him the political statistics of the colony, and shaping out his political conduct, until she suddenly turned on him, and insisted on his talking no more, but going to bed; and she had her reward, for he kissed her, and went up stairs with a brighter look on his handsome face than had been there for weeks.

She had hardly seen him out of the room, and had come back with the intention of folding up Jim's shirt and going to bed, when she started, for there was a low knock at the door.

She listened. She heard Joe lumbering up to bed, and, while she held her breath, the knocking came again a little louder.

It was at the house door. She crossed the wide dark hall which lay between the sitting-room and that door, and laid her ear against it. As she did so the knocking was repeated more impatiently. She said in a low voice, very eagerly, "Reuben?"

A shrill whisper from the other side said, "Blow Reuben. I wish Reuben had six months in a cook's shop with a muzzle on, for this here night's work. Keeping a cove hanging about a crib as has been blow'd on, with the traps a lurking about in all directions. Is that Emma?"

"Yes," she said.

"I knowed it were," said the other party, in a triumphant tone. "Young woman, young woman, open that there door. I won't hurt you. I won't even so much as kiss you, without consent freely given, and all parties agreeable."

Emma, who had a pretty good notion of taking care of herself, and was as well able to do it as any lady of our editorial acquaintance, opened the door and looked out. Looking out was no good; but, hearing something make a click with its tongue about the level of her knees, she looked down, and saw below her a very

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small boy of the Jewish persuasion, with a curly head, apparently about nine years old, and certainly under four feet high.

Her first idea was that he was the son and heir of the little Jew gentleman described to her by Jim as having defended Reuben, who had been sent with the bill. She was quite mistaken; there was no connexion between the two, save a common relationship with Abraham. Considering it necessary to say something, and feeling it safer to confine herself to polite commonplaces, she said that she was very sorry indeed to say that her father was gone to bed; but that, if he would be so good as to look round in the morning, she would feel obliged to him.

The little Jew, who, if it had not been for his beautiful eyes, hair, and complexion, would have reminded you most forcibly of a baby pike, about two ounces in weight, turned his handsome little head on one side, and smiled on Emma amorously. Then he winked; then he took a letter from behind his back, and held it before his mouth while he coughed mysteriously; then he put the letter behind him once more, and waltzed, with amazing grace and activity, for full ten bars.

"You 're a funny boy," said Emma. "If that letter is for me, you 'd better take and hand it over. If it ain't, you 'd best take and hook it; and so I don't deceive you; because I ain't going to be kept here all night with your acting. If I want to see monkeys I go to the Zellogical. There *is* some pretty ones *there*."

The small Israelite was not in the least offended. "I 'm an admirer of yourn," he said. "I 've gone and fallen in love with you at first sight; that 's about what I 've took and done. I am enamored of your person, I tell you. You 're a fine-built girl. You 're crumby; I don't go to deny that; but there 's not too much on it yet. Confine yourself to a vegetable diet, and take horse exercise regular, and you 'll never be what any man of taste would call fat. Come, it 's no use beating about the bush; I want a kiss for this 'ere letter."

"You little ape," said Emma. "Who do you think is going to kiss *you*?"

"Why, you are, unless I mistake," replied the boy. "Just one. Come on; you can't help yourself. I always were partial to your style of beauty ever since I growed up. Come, give it to us, unless I 'm to come and take it."

At this point of the conference, Emma, with a rapid dexterity, which not only took the Jew child utterly by surprise, but which ever after was a source of astonishment and admiration to Emma herself and all her friends, made a dive at him, knocked his cap off, got her fingers in his hair, and took the letter from him before he had time to get his breath. She turned on the threshold flushed with victory, and said, "*I'll* kiss you, you little Judas! With pepper-my-Barney! Oh yes, with capsicums!"

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She slammed the door in the pretty little rogue's face, and tore the letter open. She had guessed, as has possibly the reader, that it was from Reuben. It was this which made her so eager to get it. It was this which made her lose her temper at his nonsensical delay, and use for a minute or two language which, though most familiar to her ear, was utterly unfamiliar to her mouth.

The letter, given below, took about two minutes to read. In about two more she had caught down her bonnet and shawl, had blown out the candle, had silently opened the front door, had looked around, had slipped out and shut it after her, and then, keeping on the south side of Brown's Row, had crossed Church Street, and set herself to watch the Black Lion.

Meanwhile there is just time to read the letter.

"DEAREST EMMA, — Although I have gone to the dogs utterly, and without any hope at all of getting away from them any more, I should like to tell you, and for you to tell Jim, and for him to tell Master Erne and the kids, as they were all the same to me as ever, although I must never see nor speak to any of them never any more.

"I'm lost, old girl. Tell your father that I humbly pray his forgiveness for the sorrow I have brought on him. I know how wild he must be with me. He was a kind and good friend to me, and I wish I had been struck dead before I brought this trouble upon him.

"I've gone regularly to the devil now, old girl. Nothing can't save me now. I haint *done* nothing yet; — that's coming, to-night may be, — or I should n't have the cheek to write to you. Kiss the kids all round for me, and tell 'em as poor Reuben's dead and gone, and will never see 'em any more. You'd better say, old girl, that he was drownded last Tuesday, opposite the Vice-Chancellor's, a-training, and lies buried in Putney Churchyard. Something of that sort will look ship-shape.

"Good-bye, old girl, forever. Don't forget that there *were* such a chap; and that he was very fond of you all, though he was a nuisance.

"REUBEN."

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CHAPTER XLII.

EMMA ASTONISHES A GOOD MANY PEOPLE: THE MEMBERS OF HER FAMILY IN PARTICULAR.

Emma saw the Jew-boy go into the public house, and saw what went on there. He had no business in there; he did not call for anything; he merely went in as a polite attention to the company. There was a water-filter on the bar, the tap of which he set running on to the floor, and then stood and laughed at it. Upon this the bar-maid ran out of the bar to box his ears, and he dodged her and ran *into* the bar, shutting the gate behind him, and contrived to finish a pint of ale before she could get at him; and, when she did, he lay down in a corner and refused to move, or to do anything but to use language calculated to provoke a breach of the peace. She slapped him and she kicked him; but there he lay, all the company laughing at her, till at last the policeman made his appearance, and all *he* could do was to get hold of him by one leg, and drag him out on his back, with all his curls trailing in the sawdust, showing about as much care or life as a dead dog. There was nothing to do but to drag him outside, and let him lie on the pavement. When the policeman let go his leg, he managed to drop the heel of his boot with amazing force on to the policeman's toe; after which he lay for dead again.

"Whatever shall I do?" thought poor Emma. "If they lock him up, whatever shall I do?"

The landlord and the policeman stood looking at him. "Did *you* ever see such a little devil?" said the landlord.

"Never such a one as *he*. Shall I lock him up?"

"Lord bless you, no," said the landlord; "let the poor little monkey be. Good-night." And so the policeman departed round the corner.

Emma was very much relieved by this. They left the boy alone; and then, like a fox who has been shamming dead, he moved his head slightly. Then he raised it cautiously, and, seeing he was really alone, suddenly started up, gave a wild yell, and darted off like lightning up Church Street, at one minute in the road, in another on the pavement; and away started poor Emma after him, with as much chance of catching him as she would have had with a hare.

Fortunately for her quest, as she came into the King's Road

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she ran straight against the policeman, who said, with alarm and astonishment, "Miss Burton!"

"Yes. Don't delay me, for God's sake. Have you seen a little Jew boy running?"

"Lord, yes, miss," he answered laughing. "He came flying round here like a mad dog; and, when he see me, he gave a screech that went right through your head, and cut in behind they Oakley Square railings; and there he is now."

"Is he mad?" said Emma.

"No," said the policeman. "He 's skylarking; that 's what he 's up to, after the manner of his nation."

"It 's a very extraordinary and lunatic way of skylarking," said Emma. "I have got to follow him. Go home and wake Jim, and tell him where and how you saw me."

"Take care, miss, for God's sake."

"Yes, yes; see, there he comes creeping out. Go and tell Jim. I hope he won't run. Good-night."

The little Jew did not run. He began thinking what he would do next. He came to the conclusion that he would waltz, and he put his resolution into immediate execution, and waltzed up the King's Parade. But he did even this like some one possessed with evil spirits, who took every opportunity of getting the upper hand. Faster and more furious grew the boy's dancing each moment, more like the spin of a whirling Dervish, or the horrible dance in Vathek. The wildest Carmagnole dancer on the second of September would have confessed himself outdone in barbaric fury; and the few belated passengers turned and looked on with something like awe; and Emma began to fancy that she was being lured to her destruction by some fantastic devil. The poor little man had been mewed up for weeks, and all the intense vivacity of his race was breaking out, and taking the form of these strange weird tricks, — tricks which in, say a Teutonic child, would have been clear evidence of madness, but which were simply natural in a child of that wondrous, indestructible, unalterable race to which he belonged. A French girl would have been merely amused with them; but Emma, a thorough English girl, with the peculiarly English habit of judging all things in heaven and earth by the English standard, was frightened; and her fright took the thoroughly English form of obstinate anger, and nerved her to her task. "The little wretch; I will be even with him."

So she went on, eager and determined, with her eyes and her mind so concentrated on the strange little figure, that she never exactly knew where she went. The child lurked, and dodged, and ran, and dawdled, and shouted, and sang, till nothing which he could have done would have surprised her; and she found

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herself getting into a chronic state of expectation as to what he would do next.

Once again everything was nearly going wrong. The boy set off on one of his runs, and ran swiftly round a corner, and she ran round too, for fear of losing sight of him; and at the corner she met him coming back again, walking slowly, with his hands in his pockets, whistling. But he did not recognize her. He asked her how her uncle Benjamin was to-night, and told her that Bill had waited there for her till ten, but had gone off in the sulks, and was going to take her sister Sally to Hampton Court in a van, to feed the gold fish with peppermint lozenges; but he did not recognize her, and she was thankful for it.

At last, when and where she cannot tell, they came into more crowded streets; and here the young gentleman displayed a new form of vivacity, and began to play at a new game, infinitely more disconcerting than any of his other escapades. This game was trying to get run over. He would suddenly dart out into the street under the very hoofs of the fastest going cab-horse that he could see. If he could get the cabman to pull up, he would stand in the street and enter into a personal altercation with him, in which, — he being a Jew, and the cabman, nominally at least, being a Christian, — he always got the best of it. If the cab did not pull up, he dodged out of the way and tried another. This being an amusement which consumed a great deal of time, and the collection of no less than two crowds, from the second and largest of which he was walked out by a policeman in strict custody, poor Emma's heart failed her, and she began to weep bitterly.

But her "pluck" (a good word, though a vulgar one) never gave way. She determined to follow him to the station, see him in safe custody, and then confide the whole truth to the Inspector, be the consequences what they might. It was lucky that there was no necessity for such a ruinous course of proceeding.

She was following close on the heels of the boy and the policeman, when she heard this dialogue: —

"I 'm very sorry, sir. I was running after a young man as has owed me a joey ever since the last blessed Greenwich fair as ever dawned on this wicked world."

"Don't tell me: did n't I see you playing your antics all up the Cut, bobbing in and out among the horses, you young lunatic? *I 'll* shake you." And he did; and the boy wept the wild, heart-rending tears of remorse, rather more naturally than nature.

"Look here. If I let you go, will you go home?"

"Strike me blind if I don't, sir. Come, I really will, you know. Honor. I 've had my spree, and I want to get home.

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Do let me go. I shall catch it so owdacious if I ain't home soon. Come."

"There you are, then. Stow your games now. There, cut away, you monkey."

The boy played no more antics after this; he seemed to have been sobered by his last escape. He held so steadily homewards, that Emma, without any notion where she was, or where she was going, found herself opposite a low public-house, before which the boy paused.

He did not go in, but went to a door adjoining, and knocked with his knuckles. After a few minutes, the door was opened as far as the chain would allow it, and some one inside said, "Now then?"

"Nicnicabarlah," was what the boy answered.

Emma, listening eagerly, caught the word correctly, and repeated it two or three times to herself, after the boy had slipped in, and the door was shut behind him. What a strange, wicked-sounding word! Could there be any unknown, nameless sin in repeating it? There were strange tales about these Jews, and this particular one was undoubtedly possessed by one devil at least, if not a dozen. A weird word, indeed!

So she thought about it now. But afterwards, in the Sabbath of her life, the word became very familiar and very dear to her, and represented a far different train of ideas. Now it was the name, the formula, of some unknown iniquity: hereafter, when she understood everything, she smiled to know that the wicked word was only the native name for a soaring, solitary, flame-worn crag, — the last left turret in the ruin of a great volcano, — in the far-off land of hope to which they were bound. One of the first and greatest wonders in the new land was to see Nicnicabarlah catch the sun, and blaze like a new and more beautiful star in the bosom of the morning.

That strange word, had she known all she did afterwards, would have told her that Somebody was in those parts; but now she knocked at the door in ignorance, and it being demanded of her "what the office was," she pronounced the horrid word in her desperation, at imminent risk, as she half believed, of raising the devil. The only present effect of it was that she was admitted into a pitch-dark passage, by something which Emma, using the only sense then available, concluded to be a young woman of untidy habits; as, indeed, it was.

"I want Reuben Burton, if you please," said Emma, in the dark, with the coolest self-possession.

"You 're his young woman, ain't you?" said the untidy one.

Emma said, "Yes."

"Who give you the office?" said the untidy one.

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"Who could it have been but one?"

"Of course, it was Ben," said the untidy one. "But don't tell on him, young woman. He'll be torn to pieces, if you do. And he ain't a bad 'un, ain't Ben."

Emma promised she would n't, and once more asked to see Reuben.

The untidy one led her through a very, very long passage, in pitch darkness, at the end of which she by no means reassured Emma by telling her that there were nine steps to go down, and that she had better mind her head! However, she went down in safety, and was shown into a rather comfortable, cellar-like room, with a brick floor, in which there were lights and a good fire, before which sat Master Ben, the insane young Jew child possessed of the seven devils, warming himself.

He turned and recognized her at once. For one instant there was a sudden *flash*, — I mean an instantaneous expression (I can explain myself no better), — of angry astonishment on his handsome little face. Though it was gone directly, it was wonderfully visible, as passion is apt to be on Jewish faces. The moment after it had passed, he looked at her lazily, winked, and said: —

"Don't make love to me before *her*," — jerking his thumb at the untidy one, who in the light was more untidy than Emma had even anticipated from what she gathered in the dark, — "she 's enamored of me, she is. It ain't reciprocal though it may be flattering. I never give her no encouragement; so you can't blame me. It 's one of those sort of things that a man of my personal appearance must put up with. I regret it, for the young woman's sake, but wash my hands of the consequences."

The "young woman," who was old enough to be his mother, and looked old enough to be his grandmother, laughed and departed, and Emma heard her bawling to some one, to know if Chelsea Bob was in the way.

The moment she was gone, the child Ben jumped on his feet, and looking eagerly at Emma, said, "In God's name, how did you get here?"

"I followed you all the way," said Emma, with calm composure. "I heard the word you gave, and, Lord forgive me! said it myself at the door. And here I am."

"Young woman, you 're mad! You don't know where you are. I can't tell you. Quick! they 'll be here in a moment. I will let you out. Quick! — it will be too late in one minute."

"I 'll never leave this house alive, without Reuben," was Emma's quiet answer. And as she gave it, she was conscious that the bawling after "Chelsea Bob" had ceased almost as soon as it had begun, and there was a dead silence.

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"Lord of Moses!" said little Ben, clutching wildly at his hair, — "she 'll drive me mad! Emma! — girl! — young woman! — will you be sane? I 'll let you out, if you 'll go. If you don't go this instant, you 'll never go alive, I tell you. I like you. I like your face and your way, and I like Reuben, and came down all the way to Chelsea to-night for good-will towards him. I 'll get him out of this for you. I 'll do anything for you, if you 'll only clear. I shall be half-murdered for it, but I 'll do it. You 're among Levison's lot, I tell you. Coiners; you understand that. No one leaves here alive. You understand that. It will be too late directly."

It was too late already, it appeared. Two men were in the room, and three women, including the untidy one, who might now, in comparison with the two others, have made good her claim to a rather exceptional neatness of attire and cleanliness of person. The battle began by one of the men striking poor little Ben with his whole strength on the side of his head, and sending him against the bars of the fireplace, from which he fell stunned and motionless. The girl who had let Emma in, went and picked him up, and kissed him, and held him in her arms like a child, scowling all the time savagely at Emma.

"You cowardly brute," cried Emma, in full defiance, drawing herself up until she looked as big as her mother, — "striking a child like that! I want my cousin Reuben. Reuben! Reuben!"

She said this so loud, that the man who had struck the child said quickly, "Collar her!" But she was on one side of the table and they on the other; and before they had time to get round, she stopped them by saying, "I 'll put a knife in the heart of any one that comes near me. Mind that! Reuben, — Reuben! Help!"

The pause was only instantaneous. They saw that she had no knife, and rushed on her. But her cries had not been in vain. One of the men had just seized her, and was holding his hand over her mouth, when he received a staggering blow on his ear, which he remembered for a long while, about ten times harder than the one he had given to poor plucky little Ben; and a hoarse voice, belonging to the person who had given the blow, said, with perfect equanimity: —

"What 's up here? what 's up? what 's up? Hands off is manners. I won't have no girls fisted in this house."

One of the untidy young ladies was beginning to remark that she liked that, and that it was pleasing to find that they was to be overrode in their own crib by Chelsea roughs as was kept dark out of charity, when she was interrupted by Emma casting herself at the feet of the woman who had struck the blow, and crying out, —

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"Mrs. Bardolph! — help me! Dear Mrs. Bardolph, when I read the good words to you in your fever, you said you would never forget me. Help me now!"

And then that terrible woman, so hideous, so fierce, so reckless, — the woman who had been steeped in infamy from her girlhood; the woman whose past was a catalogue of crimes, whose future seemed a hopeless hell; the woman who had never forgotten God, because she had never known Him; who had never repented, because evil had been her good from childhood; this savage, unsexed termagant now bent down over poor Emma, and said, in a voice of terror, — "My God! it 's Miss Burton! Emma Burton, I would sooner have been dead than see you here. Oh, I would sooner have been dead than seen this. Oh, Miss Burton! Miss Burton! what has brought you to this evil den?"

"I have come after my cousin Reuben. I have come to save him. He is innocent, for he told me so, and he never deceived me. Mrs. Bardolph, you must die some day; don't die with this sin on your mind. Don't lend your help to ruin an innocent young man, who never harmed you. Let me see him, and I will persuade him to come away with me, and we will bless your name as long as we live."

Mrs. Bardolph, *née* Tearsheet, turned to one who stood beside her, and said, "Come, you know what I told you. Decide. Let him go." And Emma turned, too, and for the first time saw her cousin Samuel.

She did not know him. She did not even guess who this strange, long-nosed man, with the Satanic eyebrows, and his mouth close up under his nose, could be. She only saw that he was the most remarkable-looking person present, and, though he looked like a great scoundrel, yet still there was a certain air of refinement about him; so she turned to him: —

"Come, sir. You are an old man. Your account will soon be rendered. You have power here; you will not use it against this poor young man's soul. I see you are yielding, by your eyes," she went on, taking his hand. "Dear sir, you must have had a son of your own once; for his sake help me to save my cousin."

"If you take away your cousin, Emma, you take away my son, and leave me all alone."

She knew who he was now.

"Cousin! Cousin Samuel, come with him. It is never too late. Cousin, there is time yet to lead a good life in a new country, with Reuben by your side. Let us three leave here to-night together, cousin, and set our backs forever to all this evil and this forgetfulness of God. Come, cousin."

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"*I* can never go, my poor child," said the convict. "And, even if I let Reuben go, (for he 'd stay by me through everything,) I lose my only son forever."

"Not forever. Why forever? Raise yourself to his level, and don't seek to drag him down to yours. There is good in your heart yet, cousin; for your hand trembles as I speak. Hah! I have conquered. Oh, thank God! I have conquered!"

So she had. Samuel Burton drew her arm through his, and led her away, while the others stood silent. Emma saw she had been right in appealing to him. He was evidently a man of authority. There was little doubt, from the deference which was shown him by the others, that he was by far the greatest rogue in the house.

He led her up stairs, through a different way from that by which she had come in, and she found herself in a parlor, one side of which was of glass, beyond which was evidently the bar, for she heard the drinkers talking; and in this parlor there was no one but Reuben, fast asleep on a settle.

"Go up and speak to him," said Samuel, in a whisper.

Emma went up and shook him by the shoulder. "Reuben, dear," she said, "get up and come home. Jim and Joe 's a sitting up waiting for you; and father, he wants to see you before he goes to bed. Look sharp."

Reuben rose up, and looked at her sleepily. "Why, Emma, old girl," he said, "I thought I was at the Cross Keys! So I am, by gad! How did you come here?"

"I came after you. Look sharp."

Reuben looked again in wonder, and saw Samuel Burton. "Father," he said, "am I to go back there?"

"Yes, Reuben. Go back with her, — go back, and don't come here any more."

"Are you coming?" said Reuben.

"Not I, my boy. We must part for the present. Go with her. Say good-bye to me, and go."

"Why? I don't want to desert you, father. Emma ain't the girl to advise a man to pitch his own father overboard; more particularly, as in the present case, on the top of a strong ebb tide, with the wind west, and a deal more land-water coming down after the late rains, or else I 'm no waterman. Emma ain't here to-night to tell me to cut the only rope that holds my own father to the hope of better things: not if she 's the young woman I take her for, she ain't."

And so well did poor Reuben put his case, that Emma, for a moment, thought she was n't. But Samuel Burton came in on the right side, with one of those facile lies which had grown from long practice to be far more easy to him than the truth.

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"I tell you, boy, that you must go with her. Your presence here endangers both of us. She has tracked you here to-night, and the traps are not far off, as your sense will tell you. There are not two safe minutes left to say good-bye ——"

Here Emma, with an instinct of good-breeding which would have done honor to any lady in the land, went outside the door, and left them alone together. And outside the door, she found the Bardolph, *née* Tearsheet, who said, "Well, Miss Burton, I have served you well to-night."

And Emma said, "God bless you for it, — nobly."

"I suppose you would n't make no amends for it? I suppose you would n't do nothing in return as I asked you?"

"I will do anything. God, who has saved one who is very dear to me, from ruin, to-night, is my witness, Mrs. Bardolph."

"Well, when you 're a saying of your prayers, which you says them constant, as you give me to understand when I had the fever, and wanted me to do it also, — when you says 'em, take and say one for me. 'Lord!' says you, 'I don't uphold her in nothink as she 's done, but it was n't *all* her fault,' — There, there 's your sweetheart. You 'd best go. Let me send out that little devil, Ben, to see if the traps is clear. Ben! Ben!"

Ben, although he had been, a very short time before, brutally knocked on to the top of the kitchen fire, and had lain stunned for some time, was up to the mark, and appeared, with the indomitable pluck of his nation, ready for action. He was very pale and ill, but he winked at Emma, and hoped, in a weak voice, that her young man was n't jealous, for the girls was always a running after him. Having done his patrol, he came back and reported an entire absence of the executive arm, whether in the uniform of their country, or disguised in the habiliments of private citizens. And then, Emma having caught him up and kissed him a dozen times, the two cousins departed.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

EMMA GIVES THE KEY TO THE LANDLORD.

"My dear Gerty," said Sir George, looking up from his dinner at his wife, "I expect an old acquaintance of yours here this evening."

"And who is that, my dear? — an Australian?"

"No; it is only young Burton, the waterman. I think you used to like him."

"Indeed, I like him very much."

"I am very glad to hear that, Gerty, my love; for I was thinking of providing for him, as an under-keeper at Stanlake, if you did n't object."

"I object, George! I am very fond of him, indeed. He puts me in mind of a merry young man (a hand, I regret to say) that my father had, — Billy Dargan."

"Do you mean Dargan who was hung for piracy?"

"The very same. How clever of you to know that, for he was hung before your time!"

"Good heavens, Gerty! Do you mean to say that poor Reuben puts you in mind of that fellow?"

"To a most extraordinary degree," said Gerty, looking up; and then, seeing she was somehow making a terrible mistake, adding, "I mean in his way of tying his handkerchief. And there is also an indescribable style about his legs, a kind of hornpipy expression about them, which forcibly recalls poor Dargan's legs to my mind at this moment."

"I was afraid you meant that they were alike in expression of face."

"Oh, good gracious, how ridiculous!" said Gerty, who *had* meant it, nevertheless. "The idea! Fancy poor Reuben cutting a skipper's throat, and throwing the crew overboard, and practising at them with a rifle! What can make you think of such wicked things, you ridiculous old stupid?"

"You 'll be kind to him then, Gerty, old girl?"

"Indeed, I will, Georgy. I 'll be kind to anything or anybody that *you like*. I 'll be most affectionate to him, I assure you. Lor! My word! I wonder what Aggy is at now?"

"Fast asleep in bed, dear. Nine hours difference in time, you know."

"Yes; that 's very curious. It quite reminds me of Joshua

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putting back the dial of Ahaz, — I mean Ahasuerus. What a goose I must be! though I don't believe you know the difference, you dear old heathen. I say, George."

"Yes, Gerty."

"When are we going back to Cooksland, dear?"

"To Cooksland?"

"Yes, dear. Lesbia and Phelim O'Ryan are going back next month. It would be rather nice to go with them, would n't it?"

George, the baronet, with ten thousand a year, had not much notion of going back there at all, as you may suppose. But he did not wish to break the fact to Gerty suddenly. Gerty, in good humor, was a very pleasant companion; but a lachrymose and low-spirited Gerty was, as he knew by experience, enough to drive far less irritable men than he out of their senses. Her infinite silliness sat most prettily on her when she was cheerful and happy; but her silliness, when superadded to chronic, whimpering, low spirits, was unendurable. And, moreover, he had acquired a certain sort of respect for Gerty. Silly as she was, she had played her cards well enough to make his father destroy the obnoxious will. He could not deny, he thought, that all their present prosperity was owing to her. Luck had prevented his father making a new will, but Gerty's beauty and childishness had most undoubtedly been the cause of his destroying the old one. He gave that sort of respect to Gerty which is generally accorded to fortunate legatees, — the respect and admiration, in short, which we are most of us prepared to pay to luck. So he temporized.

"My love," he said, "you know that the colony is not healthy for very young children. You must know that."

She was obliged to confess that it was very notorious.

"We must wait until baby is stronger, — we must, indeed. Just think of poor Professor Brown's children, — not one left in two years."

She acquiesced with a sigh. "You know best, dear. But, oh! George, this dreadful winter! Think of the cold!"

"We will go to Italy, dear. You will never regret Australia there. Halloa, here comes Reuben. Let us have him in."

And so poor Reuben was had in. He looked a good deal older and more sobered than when we first knew him at Stanlake, but not in other respects altered, — changed in degree, but not in quality, — a little low-spirited under recent events, but not at all disinclined to be as slangy and merry as ever as soon as the sun should shine.

"Jim told me you wanted to speak to me, sir."

"Quite right. I want to know what you are thinking of doing. I wish to help you."

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"I'm a-going to Australia, sir, with my cousins. They have been very kind, sir. Whether it was their natural kindness, or whether it was my cousin Emma who influenced them, or partly both, I don't know; but after all the sorrow, and trouble, and disgrace I have caused them, they took me back again, as if nothing had happened. Any one would have thought that I had always been an honor to them, and that I had just done 'em some great kindness. The old man, he says — 'Reuben, my boy, I'm glad to see you home again. It's a poor place and will be a poorer, my old chap,' he says; 'but, such as it is, you're welcome to it.' And so I am going to Australia with them."

"But have you got any money to go with?"

"No, sir," said Reuben. "They are going to take me, and I am to make it good afterwards."

"But you would not go if you were offered a good situation in England?"

"I'd rather not go," said Reuben. "But I am doubtful how they would take it."

"George," said Gerty, suddenly and eagerly, "order the carriage for me, and let me go to these people and represent the matter to them. I will make it all right for you. Let me go."

George felt sincerely obliged to his wife for her readiness to anticipate his wishes; but it was not that which made Gerty so eager about the matter. No; these people, these Burtons, had suddenly become sacred and important people in her eyes. For were they not going to that sunny happy land where she was born; would they not soon see, with the actual eyes of the flesh, and not in dreams, as she did, that dear old home of hers, which, she began to feel, she herself would never, never, see again?

She drove hurriedly to Chelsea, and the coachman soon found the place for her. She was nearly too late. The great house was empty and the rooms all desolate: but the door was not yet shut, the neighbors told her, and there was some one in the house still; so Gerty, not a bit frightened, after knocking once or twice at the door, went in, and entered the great room on the lower floor, where the family were accustomed to live.

All deserted, melancholy, cold, and dead, the room was no more a room now than is the corpse you put into the coffin your friend. Life, motion, and sound were gone from it, and there was no expression in it, save the blank stare of death. The old walls which, when partly covered with furniture, used to laugh and wink from fifty projections in the firelight, now stared down, four cold, bare, white expanses, on little Gerty standing in the middle of the room, all in black. She had never happened to see a dismantled home before, and her gentle little soul was saddened by it; and she yearned to be with those that were gone, in the happy land far away.

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She noticed the empty open cupboards; nails upon the wall; the marks where a few pictures had hung; and the few things which were left lying about. They were very few, only such things as were deemed unworthy of removal, — a scrap of carpet with holes in it, or more correctly, some holes, with a little carpet round them; a hearth-broom, which reminded her, she said afterwards, of Lieutenant Tomkins of the Black Police, for it had shaved off its beard and whiskers, and only wore a slight mustache; a bandbox, which had been fighting, and got its head broken; and a dog of Fred's with his bellows broken off. The foolish little woman felt sorry for these things. She thought they must feel very lonely at being left behind, and went so far as to take pity on Fred's dog, and hire it for the service of Baby. And when she had done this, knowing that there were people in the house somewhere, she, as adventurous a little body, in warm weather, as you would easily find, determined to go up stairs, — and up she went; and in course of time she came to the vast room on the first floor, so often described by the young blacksmith in these pages, and peeped in.

It was all bare, empty, and dismantled. There was nothing in it. But two people stood together in one of the many windows which looked westward; and they stood so still and silent, and looked so strange and small in the midst of the majestic desolation, that Gerty stood still too, and was afraid to speak.

They were a young man and a young woman, and the young woman said, "You hardly did right in coming back this afternoon, when you knew I was all alone. Did you now?"

"I don't know, and I don't care, Emma. I knew that yours was to be the last footstep which crossed the threshold and left the dear old house to darkness and solitude, and I determined to be with you. Loving you so madly as I do, every board in these rooms which you have walked on is sacred to me by the mere tread of your footstep. So I determined to see the last of the house with you, who are the cause of my loving it, and who get dearer to me day by day and hour by hour."

"Erne! Erne! don't drive me mad. You have no right to talk to me like this."

"I have. You gave it once. Do you think you can recall it? Never! I have the right to talk to you like this until you can look me in the face and tell me that you do not love me. And when will that be, hey?"

"Never," she answered, "as you well know. Are you determined, cruelly, to make me undergo my full punishment for two days' indiscretion?"

"Yes; there is no escape but one. I am determined."

"And so am I," said Emma, wearily. "It is time to go, is it

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not? Are you going to persist in your mad refusal of your share of the property?"

"Let him give it me then. I will never ask him for it," replied Erne.

"What insanity!" she repeated. "When Mr. Compton tells you that your share of the personal property would be nearly enough to keep you in England."

"I will never ask for it."

"You mean that you will follow me, and bring yourself to my level."

By this time Gerty had fully satisfied herself that she was eavesdropping, and, hearing her husband's name mentioned, felt it high time to say, "Ahem!" Whereupon the couple in the window turned; and Erne and she recognized one another, and, Erne running to her, she fairly threw her arms round his neck, and hugged him.

"My dear Erne, to find you here! You never did, you know. And your pretty sweetheart, too; you must give me a kiss, dear Emma! do you remember the day I nearly fainted in church, and you put your arm round me? My dear, you are the very person I wanted. Sir George sent me here to say that he is willing to provide handsomely for Reuben, if you won't be offended at his staying behind. Reuben wants your father to have it explained to him that he is not ungrateful, but the contrary. You'll undertake to square matters, won't you? What were you and Erne quarrelling about just now? I want you to tell me; because, in return for your making the peace between Reuben and your father, I will set matters all right between Erne and you. Come, now, tell me?"

Erne said that it was only an outbreak of violence on Emma's part.

"Oh! that is nothing. George is like that sometimes. Are you two married?"

Erne said "No. Not yet."

"If I was in your place, I should send down to the township for the parson, and get tied up right away. That will be the real peppermint, you'll find; because, you see, dear, now that your father and all your brothers and sisters are gone, you'll find it lonely."

"I am going with them, ma'am," said poor Emma.

"Oh dear! I hope you have not broken with Erne. My sweetest girl, he loves the ground you walk on. Oh my good gracious goodness me! why, he never used to talk to one about anything else. I never was so sorry; I'd sooner that the garden was a-fire; I'd sooner that all the sheep were adrift in the Mallee; I'd sooner that the Honeysuckle dam was mopped up as dry as Sturt Street; I'd sooner ——"

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"Gerty, dear," said Erne, arresting her in her Homeric catalogue of the evils which come on those who have fallen under the anger of the gods (in Australia), and taking her aside, "Nothing is broken off. I am going to Cooksland too."

Gerty, having been suddenly shunted off one line of rails, while at full speed, and being very much astonished, put on all her breaks and stopped; which gave Erne time to go on.

"My dearest sister, you can be of most inestimable service to us. I could not get at you (you know why, dear), and it seems a special Providence, my having met you here. What I want done is this: go home and write letters to your sister and brother-in-law, introducing me and the Burtons. Say all that you can about us. Do the best you can, and send these letters to this address. Above all, dear Gerty, do this. Now, I am very much in earnest, dear, and I am sure you will do as I ask you. Tell George every particular about this interview, and what I have asked you to do, before you put pen to paper. Will you promise me this?"

Yes, she would promise it, if need were; but, did n't Erne think, that under the circumstances, eh? And James could do so much for them, too. And if George *were* to forbid her to write?

Erne said, "He will give you leave, Gerty. I'll bet you a pair of gloves he does. George is justly and righteously angry with me just now, but he 'll forgive me some day: when I am worthy of his forgiveness. When I have made my fortune, Gerty, I will come and kneel at his feet. He would suspect me now I am poor. Now, good-bye."

Those three came out of the old house into the summer sunshine, and Emma came last, and then turned and locked the door. Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, son of the blacksmith at Putney, first opened that hospitable old door, and now Emma Burton, daughter of the blacksmith at Chelsea, locked it up forever.

When mighty America was only a small irregular line on the chart of the world, that pile of brick and stone was built up; and we, poor worms of a day, have seen it stand there, and have weaved a child's fancies about it. I, who write, remember well that, on my return home, after a long residence in the most fire-new of all sucking empires, constructed with the highest improvements, — gas, universal suffrage, telegraphs, religious toleration, and all, — it was a great wonder to me, living in a house which had actually been built nearly sixty years. I remember that, at first, the date of every building I saw, and the reflections as to what had happened since that building was put up, had an intense interest for me. A Londoner passes Westminster Abbey

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every day in the week, and it is Westminster Abbey to him, and there is a cab-stand at the corner: but, if you want to know what veneration for antiquity means, you must go to an American or to an Australian to find out: you must follow Mr. and Mrs. Nalder, through Westminster Abbey,—taking care they don't see you, or they will immediately vilipend the whole affair, for the honor of old Chicago.

So Emma, preparing for her flight from the country of impertinent sparrows, to the country of still more impertinent parrakeets, locked the door, and ended the history of Church Place as a home. Hereafter, during the short space that the old house stood, no lover lingered about the door in the summer twilight, for the chance of one more sweet whisper; no children played about the door-step, or sent the echoes of their voices ringing through the lofty rooms; no blushing, fluttering bride passed in to her happiness; and no coffin was ever carried forth, save one.

CHAPTER XLIV.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: OUR VOYAGE, WITH A LONG DESCRIPTION OF SOME QUEER FISH THAT WE SAW.

I KNOW that my love for Erne Hillyar was, at first, only one of those boy-friendships which I suppose all boys have had; which after a time fade away, and then flow strong again for another object; or, if there be no new object, simply wear out into a kind of half-jealous regret. "He don't care for me as he used," you say mournfully; no, but how much do you care for him, my good friend? Would you go into the next street to meet him, if it would prevent your going ten miles to get ten minutes with Mary? I think not. These boy passions die out to a certain limit, and to a certain limit only; for there is always a tenderness left for the old boy after all. Tom must always have reserved for him the inestimable and delicious privilege of being bored to death with the catalogue of Mary's perfections, until he mentally howls at the mention of that dear creature's name; and Tom must be your best man at the wedding, if procurable, because the renewal of the old *tendresse* on that particular occasion is something sentimentally good and graceful, even if it is the finish and end of the whole business, — for which result there is no possible reason.

But my friendship for Erne was not of this kind altogether,

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for it grew and developed. Martha never came between him and me for a moment. I fell in love with Martha, — well, principally, I believe, because I fell in love with her. Come, sir, what made you fall in love with your wife? Don't know. No more do I know why I fell in love with my wife, unless it was her spraining her ankle on the slide by Clerkenwell Prison, and having no one to take her home. But, having once fallen in love with her, I began to find out, by degrees, what a noble, excellent little body she was; and so my love for her grew and grew, and I would not like to swear (though I should not like her to know it) that it has reached its full development yet. And yet, the more I loved Martha, the more my friendship for Erne became part of myself. For, having inherited from my mother the trick of living, save on special emergencies, in the future, or in the past, or anywhere but in the present, I had gradually built up for myself a palace of fancy, quite as beautiful as you could expect from a mere blacksmith's lad, in which palace Martha and I were to live forever in comfort by the products of my trade, and in which also Erne and Emma were to take up their abode with us, and live on, — say manna or quails: details are contemptible. I fancy, if my recollection serves me, that part of the scheme was that Martha and I were to have four children, two boys and two girls, exceedingly beautiful and good; and that, when we had arrived at this point, we were to stop, — which we have n't. I think also, at one time, after having seen a certain picture, that I intended to have another and a fifth child, who was to die beautifully in infancy, and to do something absolutely tremendous, in a sentimental point of view, on its death-bed. I don't know how long this last fancy, — thank God, only a fancy, — endured; but I do know that this dear martyr was the only one of my five children for whom I sketched out any future whatever. The other four were to remain children, ranging in age from two years to seven, until Martha and I, gray-headed in the character of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, were borne together (having died the same day, — a matter of detail easily arranged on a future opportunity) into the church-yard of the late ingenious Mr. Gray's "Elegy," followed by a sorrowing population.

Erne and Emma had become so necessary a part of this day-dream, and this day-dream moreover had become such a very necessary part of myself, that I was more distressed than you can well conceive at the estrangement between them. The more so, because I did not for one moment share Erne's hope of any alteration taking place in Emma's resolution. Whether I judged on this matter from reason or from instinct I hardly know; whichever it was, my conclusion was the same. I had a profound

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faith in a certain quiet determination which I saw now in Emma's face, and which in my moments of irritation, — an irritation, however, which I never outwardly showed, — I called obstinacy.

I had my sanguine moods, however. There was a gentle, tender, and yet unobtrusive assiduity about Erne's attentions to her, which gave me great hopes. No woman, I thought, could resist that sort of thing long, particularly a woman who loved him as she loved him. Alas! though I knew it not, it was her very love for him which gave her the strength to resist him. When my mother told me what she had said, "He must rise, and I should only drag him down," I lost hope again. That motive, superadded to her devotion to poor Joe, made my day-dream fade away once more.

Now, being in a certain line of business myself, I made the remarkable discovery, which has been confirmed by later experience on my own part, and by comparison of notes with eminent travellers from all quarters of the globe, that there is no such a place for courting as aboard ship. Even suppose that the ship completed her voyage on a perfectly even keel, without any motion whatever, — even in that extreme case you would have the great advantage of constant intercourse. But then she don't; but, on the contrary, rolls, dives, and leaps like a mad thing, three quarters of her time, and by this means actually, as well as metaphorically, so throws young people together, — gives rise to such a necessity for small attentions, — that it 's wonder to me sometimes, — when in one of my mother's moods, why, on the arrival of the ship into port, all the unmarried couples on board don't pair off, and go straight off to church to get married.*

One day of one long voyage comes before me particularly clearly. And yet, as I write, I cannot say that all the little circumstances which I tell took place on that day or on several; for at sea Time is naught, but his mechanical and earthly eidola, latitude and longitude, take his place. I can't tell you in what month this day (or these days, it may be) fell; but it was in the trades, though whether N. E. or S. E. I cannot at this period undertake to remember. Yes, it was in the trades.

For all space was filled with a divine gray-blue effulgence, which has, to my wandering fancy, always seemed to be the trade-wind itself, — the only visible wind I know of. It was not too hot nor too cold, nor too bright nor too dull; and the ship was going fast, and heeling over enough to make everything you leant against more pleasant than a rocking-chair, — going with a gentle heaving motion, for which it would be absurd to hunt up

* I beg to call the Hon. J. Burton's attention to the fact that they almost always do.

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a simile, because there is nothing so wonderfully delightful wherewith to compare it. There were clouds, slow sailing clouds, but they were of frosted silver; and there was open sky, but of the very faintest blue, save immediately overhead, where the delicate needle of a top-gallant mast swept across it in a shortened arc, and where it was a faint purple. There were sounds, — one a gentle universal rush, that of the wind itself, filling space; and others, supplementary voices, the low gentle lapping of the waves upon the ship's side, and the sleepy gurgling and hissing of many eddies around her. All things seemed going one way with some settled kindly purpose. The clouds seemed to be leading the wind, and the wind to be steadily following the clouds, while the purple waves, a joyous busy crowd, seemed to be hurrying on after both of them, to some unknown trysting-place. Yes, I know we were in the trades.*

Martha was sitting on the top of some spare spars under the lee bulwark, and I was sitting beside her, but on a lower level, and a little more forward, so that I had to lean backwards whenever I wanted to look in her face. And this was a very nice arrangement, because I generally found that she was looking at me, and I caught the soft, quiet gaze of her deep calm love, before it broke into the gentle smile that, — Hallo here, hallo! this will never do. I mean that it was a very good place to sit in, because it was in the shade under one of the boats, and we could quietly watch every one else, and make our comments upon them. No one ever took the trouble to watch us. Every one knew that we were keeping company. We were rather favorites in the ship from being a quiet pair of bodies, but were otherwise uninteresting.

By the mainmast was my father, in close confabulation with "Damper." Now, although "Damper" is only a nickname, and a rather low one, yet you are not to suppose that the gentleman who owns it is at all a low person. He, as he stands there against the mainmast, with his square brown face and grizzled hair, against my father's square brown face and grizzled hair, is a most resplendent and magnificent gentleman. His clothes are the richest and best-made that London can give him; the watch and chain he wears in and over his white waistcoat cost more than a hundred guineas; he has been five-and-twenty years in Australia, and is worth very nearly half a million of money; his style and titles before the world are the Honorable Elijah Dawson, M. L. C., of no less than seven places, colonial estates of his, with names apparently made up by a committee of all the luna-

* Mr. Henry Burton begs to state that the whole of the above paragraph is copied *verbatim* from his log-book. The passage as it stands may be found at p. 58 of his "Miscellanies in Verse and Prose." Bleet. Palmerston: 1858.

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tics in Bedlam at full moon. Yet this man is disrespectfully called "Damper," (which is a low colonialism, a common name for a working bullock,) behind his back, by the whole ship's company; and I, — I, the blacksmith's lad, — have that man under my thumb and in my power to that extent that, whenever I take the liberty of being in company with him, he addresses the principal part of the conversation deferentially to me. I don't know that I ever should have the heart to denounce the low-lived villain; but it *is* pleasant to hold a man who wears a hundred-guinea watch, as it were, in the hollow of your hand.

The truth is that I found this low fellow out quite accidentally. One day, going on board the ship when she was in the docks, I, who had already heard what a great man he was, was struck not only with his magnificent appearance, but also with the practical knowledge he showed, connected with some rather delicate machinery, a small case of which had been broken open by careless men. I was surprised to hear him tell his servant carefully to lubricate the articles with Rangoon oil before they were repacked, to keep the salt air from them; and there was something grand and strange in finding that so splendid a person could be up in such details as these, or should take the trouble to attend to them. But, half an hour after, I found the low-lived impostor out. Going into a blacksmith's forge in the Commercial Road, there I found him. His coat and waistcoat were off; his hundred-guinea watch was laid on the bench among the tools; his head was bare; his shirt-sleeves were turned up to his elbows; and he was engaged in welding two pieces of iron together, one of the smiths assisting him, with a rapidity and dexterity in the use of his hammer which proved at once the disgraceful fact. This legislator, this responsible adviser of his sovereign's representative, this millionnaire aristocrat, this fellow who only the week before had disported himself in the presence of royalty at St. James's with breeches and silk stockings on his impostor's legs and silver buckles in his low-lived shoes, — this man was not only a blacksmith, but an uncommon good one.

I don't think I ever felt so proud of the old British empire before. I wished the Queen could have seen him, and I dare say she would have been as pleased as I was. But the Honorable Elijah Dawson did not see it in this light at all. Every one who had ever heard his name, from her Majesty downwards, knew that this great Australian millionnaire had been a blacksmith, and he knew they knew it; it was the crowning point of his honor; and yet the honest fellow was most amusingly ashamed of it. When I found him in the shop, he put on his coat and waistcoat, and took me by the arm, pushing me before him into a neighboring public-house. He then made me swallow a glass of strong waters before he said anything.

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"I see you aboard the ship to-day."

"Yes, sir."

"You 're a smith yourself, ar'n't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't say nothing about what you see me doing on. I'm a friend of yours. Don't say nothing of it aboard ship. There's Pollifex and Morton aboard, and I should never hear the last on it. It was that Morton as christened me 'Damper'; and see how that's stuck. Hold your tongue, my boy, and I'm a friend of yours, remember."

And so he was, a most generous and kind one. We had hardly got to sea before he found my father out. The two men, so much of an age, and so much alike, conceived a strong liking for one another, which, as you may guess, was of immense benefit to us.

Whom else do Martha and I see, from our lair under the boat? Why, Pollifex and Morton, of whom our friend, Elijah Dawson, stands so much in dread. They have come down into the waist to smoke their cigars, and are leaning against the capstan. Let us, with the assistance of my brothers Joe and Henry, have a look at these two typical men; it is really worth the time.

The Honorable Abiram Pollifex, — "Accommodation Pollifex," "Footrot Pollifex," "Chimpansee Pollifex," as he is indifferently called by his friends and enemies, — is only a new comer in Cooksland, having migrated thither from the older and better-known Australian colony of Endractsland, where, for a considerable number of years, he filled the post (Harry says that is not good English, but I am head of the family, and will use what English I choose) of Colonial Secretary. His great political object, consistently, and somewhat skilfully pursued through sixteen years, precisely corresponded with that of Sir Robert Walpole, as described by Mr. Carlyle, "To keep things going, and to keep himself, Robert Walpole, on the top of them."

I am not sure that the historical parallel between these two great statesmen need stop at the mere statement of their political motives. There is a certain similarity in the means they used to attain their end. They both bribed as hard as they could, and both did as little as possible in the way of legislation. With regard to bribery, Walpole was decidedly the greatest man, save in intention; but, with regard to "*laissez aller*," Pollifex beat him hollow.

Pollifex, — a long, lean, lanthorn-jawed Devonshire squireen, known through all the old West country for his *bonhommie*, his amazing powers of dry humor, and wonderfully remarkable personal appearance, — assumed the place of prime minister in Endractsland, somewhere in the dark and prehistoric ages (say as long ago as 1820), because there did n't happen to be any one

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else. He was one of the best secretaries they ever had. To say that he governed the colony wisely and well would be to talk nonsense, because he never governed it at all, but showed his great shrewdness in letting it develop itself. When he took the reins, the landscape was still lit up with the lurid glare of the convict hell, from the dark night of which the little community had barely emerged. When he dropped them, the tide of free emigration had set strongly in; and he himself saw that the dawn had begun, and that the time of free institutions was at hand, — that, with some restrictions, a rather liberal suffrage could be conceded to the new non-convict emigrants who had poured in in such numbers, and to such of the convicts as had so far practically shown their reformation as to have homesteads of 180 acres. Then the old Tory took himself quietly out of the gap, and let the waters run in. He had no objection to looking on, and seeing it done, but he would have no hand in it. *He*, at all events was no Tory who would bid for power by bringing in a measure of Reform.

I have said that he did nothing; and in a legislative point of view he *had* done nothing; and yet he had done that same nothing in such a wonderfully shrewd and dexterous way that in the end it amounted to a very great something. No less than five governors, — all of them good gentlemen, but each and all of them absolutely ignorant of the temper of the colonists and the wants of the colony, — had been sent over to him; and he, by his tact, had prevented every one of these new brooms from sweeping too clean, until they saw where to sweep: nay, very often succeeded in persuading them not to sweep at all, but to let the dust be blown away by the free winds of heaven; and this was something. Again, his own wealth had grown enormously, as wealth will grow in Australia; his sheep and cattle multiplied under his superintendents; and so his interests got identified with the squatters. Thus he had the power, as one of the greatest of them, to stand between them and the *doctrinaires* and retired military officers who were in those times sent out as governors. He bribed shamefully in the creation of places for the sons of turbulent colonists; but he always kept a clear balance-sheet; and, as for as his own hands, they were as clean as snow; he was a poorer man by many thousands from his long retention of office. A man of higher aspirations, and less practical shrewdness, would not have done the work half so well. On the emergence of the colony from the Sodom-and-Gomorrah state of things incidental on a convict community, into such a noble kingdom as Endracts-land now is, there is a certain amount of dirty work which some one must do. James Oxton found a virgin soil, and brought over a free population. *His* work was as clean as his own shirt-front, and he did it well. Abiram Pollifex found Bedlam and Newgate boiling

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up together, and had to watch the pot. All honor to him that he did the dirty work as cleanly as he did.

Now let us take a glance at the handsome brown-faced, gentlemanly looking dandy, with a carefully trimmed mustache, who stands beside him. He is a very different sort of person; infinitely more of a "representative" man than Chimpansee Pollifex, from the simple fact that he is by no means an uncommon article, — nay, more, is one of the commonest articles going, — though developed, as far as he is capable of development, by exceptional circumstances; a young English gentleman of good family, with a public-school education. When we were over in England for the Exhibition of 1862, we hired a carriage and went for a drive in the park; and there, if we saw one Charles Morton, we saw five hundred. Charles Mortons were standing against the rails in long rows like penguins, — each one most wonderfully like the other; all cast nearly in the same mould by Nature, and, if not, every trifling peculiarity of outward look polished away by inexorable custom; all dressed alike, with their beards and mustaches so exactly in the same pattern that it became ludicrous; men whom those who don't know them sneer at as mere flaneurs, but whose suppressed volcanic energy shows itself, to those who care to observe, in that singularly insane and dangerous amusement, fox-hunting, — all men with whom falsehood, cowardice and dishonor, are simply nameless impossibilities. We know them better than we did, since the darkening hours of Sebastopol and Delhi, and it was only their own faults that such as I did not know them better before. The halo of glory which was thrown round the heads of these dandies, by their magnificent valor from 1854 to 1859, has done the body of them an infinite deal of harm. We can trust you, and will follow you in war, gentlemen; but in peace, cannot you manage to amalgamate a little more with the middle and lower classes? Are the old class-distinctions to go on forever, and leave you dandies, the very men we are ready to take by the hand and make friends of, in a minority, as regards the whole nation, of 99 to 1? Can't we see a little more of you, gentlemen, just at this time, when there is no great political difficulty between your class and ours; if it were only for the reason that no one out of Bedlam supposes that things are always to go on with the same oily smoothness as they are doing just now. I think we understand you, gentlemen. I wish you would take your gloves off sometimes. You have been more courteous to us since the Reform Bill; but certain ill-conditioned blackguards among us say that it is only the courtesy which is engendered of fear, and but ill replaces the old condescending *bonhommie* which we shared with your pointers and your grooms. Douglas Jerrold is dead, and buried at Ken-

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sal Green; and there happens to be no one alive at present who is able or cares to overstate the case of the poor against the rich with quite so much cleverness as he. But at any dark hour another man of similar abilities might come forth and make terrible mischief between us again. You can be earnest and hearty enough about anything of which you see the necessity. Can no one persuade you that the most necessary thing just now is an amalgamation of classes? You could never get together a *Jeunesse Dorée* without our assistance, and yet you treat us like *sans-culottes*.

Charles Morton was at Eton, and, while there, I do not doubt displayed the qualities hereditary in his family, — truth, honor, and manliness. Another quality, also hereditary in his family, he got but scant opportunity of displaying at Eton, — I allude to the accomplishment of horsemanship; but, when he got to St. Paul's College, Oxford, he made up for lost time. From this time forward he seemed to forget that he had any legs. Boating, cricket, football, everything was neglected utterly. He got on horseback and stayed there; and henceforth the history of the man's life is the history of his horses.

Hunting at Oxford, as I gather from the highest attainable authority, costs just five pounds a day if you send on; and you can hunt five days a week. By a rough calculation, then, Charley must have spent near five hundred pounds in the hunting season. Besides this, he liked to be dressed like a gentleman. Besides this, again, he was fond of seeing his friends, and his friends were rather a fast and noisy lot, as Greatbatch's bill clearly proved. "Why, Charley, my boy," said his father, "you seem not only to have drunk the punch, but to have swallowed the bowls afterwards." All of which would certainly cost four hundred a year more. Thus we have brought Charley up to nine hundred a year, without mentioning any other items of extravagance; whereas his allowance was strictly limited to 350*l*. It became necessary for Master Charley to leave the University.

The governor had just had in a few little bills from Charley's elder brother Jim, in the 140th Dragoons; and so he had heard enough of the army just then. Law and physic were denied to Charley from incapacity and idleness; and, as there did not seem to be any reasonable hope of fitting Charley, with his habits, for a cure of souls at a less expense than some five thousand pounds, it was considered that, taking risks into consideration, the Church would barely pay the interest on the money. Therefore there was nothing to do but for him to go to Australia.

The discovery of that vast continent which we call Australia is an important era in the history of the world. For it opened, in the first place, a career for young gentlemen possessed of every virtue, save those of continence, sobriety, and industry,

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who did n't choose to walk and could n't afford to ride; and, viewed from this point, its discovery ranks next in importance after the invention of soda-water, — a sort of way of escaping cheaply from the consequences of debauchery for a time. But not only did the new country turn out to be the most wonderfully scentless cesspool for a vast quantity of nameless rubbish, convicted and unconvicted; but it gave an opening also for really honest, upright fellows like Charles Morton, with no more faults than the best of us, except the very great one of being educated in such a way that no possible career is open to them. What is a fellow to do if his father chooses to play his game of whist with fourteen cards, and if he happens to be the fourteenth?

The very qualities which made Charles a most expensive and useless, though highly ornamental, piece of furniture at home, caused him to be a most useful and valuable commercial partner among the Bucolic, almost in those times Nomadic, aristocracy of the new land. The same spirit that took Charley's Norman ancestors to Jerusalem took Charley to the Conamine. Charles Morton is our very greatest pioneer. Neither Gil Maclean (brother of Colonel Maclean, — "Red" Maclean, as he is generally called) nor Corny Kelly, the most popular man in the colony with men and women, can compare with Charley as a pioneer. The two Celts are as brave as he, but they both fail in the point of temper. Both the Highlander and the Irishman are too hot with the blacks, and embroil themselves with them. Charles Morton has Charles Sturt's beautiful patient temper. Like him, he can walk quietly among the wretched savages, and, with fifty spears aimed quivering at his heart, and ready to fly at any moment, can sit quietly down and begin to laugh, and laugh on until they begin to laugh too. His two noble friends, Maclean and Kelly, can't do this. Their Celt blood is too pure: in convivial moments they chaff Charley with having a cross of Saxon in him; and, if they knew the truth, they would hug themselves on their sagacity.

These qualities of Charles Morton have been so highly appreciated that he is at this moment the most important partner in the "Northwest Company"; of which company, consisting of eight wealthy men, James Oxton is the most active manager. Charles Morton, married, as we know from former passages of this book, Lady Hillyar's elder sister, and so is James Oxton's brother-in-law. I suppose that, as this thriftless horse-riding dandy stands there on the deck, talking to Abiram Pollifex, he is worth from fifty to sixty thousand pounds.

There sits my mother on the deck, too, with the children lying about on her skirts, or propping themselves up against her, as if she were a piece of furniture. My mother's mind has returned

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to its old peaceful lethargic state once more. On the occasion of Fred's casting himself down the skylight on to the top of the second-cabin dinner-table, she remarked that it was cheering to know that all the houses in Australia were of one story, and that the great trouble of her life would soon be over. And, taking care of poor Joe, who is very ailing and weak, low in mind and body, and needs all her care (and will need more of it yet, I see, with a falling countenance), there sits Emma in the sunshine working, and Erne has just come and leant over her, and is speaking to her. I wonder what he is saying. Some commonplace; for she only smiles, and then goes wearily on with her work.

Such were the new acquaintances with whom we began our new life in the new land. How long we have gossiped about them, these odd people and their histories! so long, that we have been four months on the restless sea, and now there is a different scent in the air. Ha! here is the first messenger from the shore. A fly, — a blue-bottle fly; for he buzzes, and is difficult to catch, and bangs his idiotic head against the glass; in all respects a blue-bottle, save, oh wonderful fact! that he is brown. Yes, he is the first instance of those parallel types, reproduced in different colors, and with trifling differences, — so small as to barely constitute a fresh species, — and the origin of which is such a deep deep wonder and mystery to me to this day. Tell me, O Darwin, shall we know on this side of the grave why or how the Adiantum Nigrum and Asplenium capillis Veneris, have reproduced themselves, or, to be more correct, have produced ghosts and fetches of themselves at the antipodes? I have seen icebergs and cyclones, and many things; but I never was so lost in puzzled wonder as I was that afternoon when I found Asplenium viride growing in abundance on the volcanic boulders, at the foot of Mirngish. It was Sunday afternoon, and I went home and thought about it, and I am thinking about it still.*

But see; a new morn arises, and flushes a crimson and purple light, in long streamers, aloft to the zenith; and we are sailing slowly along under high-piled forest capes, more strange, more majestic, and more infinitely melancholy than anything we have seen in our strangest dreams. What is this awful, dim, mysterious land, so solemn and so desolate? This is Australia.

* Australian Asplenium Viride cannot be distinguished; no more can Australian Woodsia Hyperborea.

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CHAPTER XLV.

GERTY IN SOCIETY.

THOSE whom one has asked say that it is easy enough for any one with either brains, or money, or manners, to see a great deal of society in London, — to be, in fact, in the room with the very greatest people in the land, to be presented to them, and speak to them, — and yet not to be in society at all, in one sense of the word. If this is so, as there is no disputing, we should say that, if ever people were in this predicament, those two people were George and Gerty. The season after his father's death, George went to London, refurnished the house in Grosvenor Square, filled the balconies with flowers, had new carriages, horses, and servants, made every preparation for spending double his income, and then sat down to wait for society to come and be hospitably entertained with the best of everything which money could buy.

Society had quite enough to eat and drink elsewhere. It wanted to know first who this Sir George Hillyar was, — which was easily found out from the Tory whip, and from Burke. Next it wanted to know who his wife was; and it discovered that she was a mulatto woman (alas, poor Gerty!), or something of that kind. And, lastly, there was a most general and persistent inquiry whether you did not remember some very queer story about this Sir George Hillyar; and the answer to this was, among the oldsters, that there *was* something deused queer, and that no one seemed to remember the fact.

But, of course, they were by no means without acquaintances. Old Sir George had been too highly respected for that, though he had utterly withdrawn himself from the world. So by degrees they began to creep into society. The world found that George was a gentleman, with a scornful, silent, proud, and somewhat pirate-like air about him, which was decidedly attractive. As for Gerty, the world stood and gazed on her with speechless wonder. After Easter, to hear this wonderful Lady Hillyar talk was one of the things one must do. Her wonderful incomprehensible babble was so utterly puzzling that the very boldest wits were afraid to draw her out for the amusement of any company, however select. No one knew whether she was in earnest or not, and her slang was such a very strange one. Besides, what she would say next was a thing which no one dared to predict, and was too great a risk to be rashly ventured on, even by the very boldest. A few

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women made her out and began to like her; and her wonderful beauty could not have failed to win many in the long-run; still, during their first and last season in London, this was the sort of thing which used to be heard in doorways, and on the landings of stairs:—

"That's a devilish pretty little woman in white."

"What, Lady Georgina Rumbold?"

"Lord, no. The little woman in white calico, next but one to her. The woman who is all over Cape jessamine. Is she going to dance with the sweeps? Who is she?"

"That? That is Lady Hillyar," says No. 2.

"What, the little woman who swears?"

"She don't swear," says No. 2. "I wish she would; there would be some chance of finding out what she was talking about."

"I heard that she was a mulatto woman," says No. 1, "and swore like a trooper."

"She is not a mulatto woman," says No. 3. "She is a French creole heiress from New Orleans. Her husband is the original of Roland Cashel, in Lever's last novel. He married her out there, while he was in the slave-trade; and now his governor 's dead, and he has come into twenty thousand a year."

"You are not quite right, any of you," says No. 4, who has just come up. "In the first place, Sir George Hillyar's income is not, to my certain knowledge, more than three thousand,—the bulk of the property having been left to his brother Erne, who is living at Susa with Polly Burton, the rope-dancer from Vauxhall. And, in the next place, when he had to fly the country, he went to Botany Bay, and there married the pretty little doll of a thing sitting there at this moment, the daughter of a convict, who had been transported for—

"For ratting before his master, I suppose, my lord," said Sir George Hillyar, just looking over his shoulder at the unhappy Peelite, and then passing quietly on into the crowd.

But, in spite of George's almost insolent *insouciance*, and Gerty's amazing volubility in describing her equally amazing experiences, this couple, queer though they were pronounced, were getting on. Kind old Lady Ascot fell in love with Gerty, and asked her and her husband to Ranford. The Dowager Lady Hainault, seeing that her old enemy had taken up this little idiot, came across to see if she could get a "rise" out of Gerty. Gerty rewarded Lady Ascot's kindness by telling old Lady Hainault, before a select audience, that she did n't care a hang for a hand's going on the burst for a spell, provided he war n't saucy in his drink. Her hopeless silliness, now that she was removed from the influence of those two thoroughbred ladies, Mrs. Oxton and Mrs. Morton, was certainly very aggravating. It was foolish in Mrs. Oxton to trust her out of her sight.

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Things went on thus for no less than two years. Gerty, having no idea but that she was as much sought after as any one else, and that she was so on account of her social qualities actively, was perfectly contented and happy. She found out, of course, that certain houses were more difficult to get into than others; so, if she was asked to a party at Cheshire House, she would be ravished, and write a long account of it to James and Aggy, and would read this, with the greatest delight, in the *Palmerston Sentinel*, six months after it was sent to her by her sister: — "We understand that our late reigning beauty, Lady Hillyar, who, as Miss Gertrude Neville, astonished our colony by showing us that there was one being in the world more beautiful than Mrs. Buckley of Garoopna, has fluttered the dovecotes of the British aristocracy most considerably, by her *début* at Cheshire House. It is possible that, if anything can bring the present Government to its senses about their hellish design of continuing transportation to these unhappy islands, that purpose may be accomplished by the contemplation of, &c., &c., &c." On the other hand, if she was not asked, she would console herself by telling Baby that the Duchess was a nasty odious old thing, and that her wig was the color of tussac grass in January. Sometimes she would have a yearning for her old Australian home, which would hold her for a day or two, — during which time she would be very low and tearful, and would keep out of George's way. But, after having poured all her sorrows and vain regrets into Baby's ear, she would become cheerful once more, and the fit would pass off. What she would have done without this precious baby to talk to I dread to think. Her mind would have gone, I suspect. She is not the first woman who has been saved from madness by a baby.

By the time that Baby, just now called Kittlekins, short for its real name, George (George, — Georgy-porgy, — Porgy, — Poggy, — Pug, — Pussy; Kitty Kittles, — Kittlekins; by what process of derivation his later and more permanent name of Bumbles was evolved, I confess myself at a loss to explain), just when Bumbles was getting old enough to join in the conversation, and to advise and assist his mother from his large experience, something occurred which altered their mode of life entirely, and quite shipwrecked poor little Gerty's chance of happiness for a very long while.

Mr. Nalder accepted a rather important diplomatic appointment in the American Embassy in London. As the revenues of this office, with economy, would very nearly pay for Mrs. Nalder's bonnets,* Nalder determined to devote a considerable

* I wish the Americans would teach us the secret of getting the men they do for the money they give.

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proportion of his handsome private income to what he called "hanging out," and took a house in Grosvenor Place, two doors from the George Hillyars. They were, of course, received everywhere in virtue of their diplomatic rank, and people began to get very fond of them, as such worthy people deserved. Meanwhile their intimacy with the George Hillyars was renewed with tenfold warmth. Mrs. Nalder thought, from their parting two years or more ago, that all was forgotten and forgiven between them, and so treated them both with affectionate *empressement*. Gerty, the silly little thing, began to get jealous of Mrs. Nalder once more, and to watch and spy about.

Of course, she would not believe that George had anything to do with it. He behaved *nobly*, according to Gerty; it was that dreadful and *most dangerous* woman who would not leave him alone. And so she made up the old old jealous woman's story over again, in a way which, considering it had not the slighest foundation in fact, did her infinite credit.

In the midst of it all, when her suspicions were at their highest, they went down for a few days to Stanlake, and the Nalders came with them. Gerty, to throw Mrs. Nalder off her guard, was excessively gay and cheerful; so the visit went off capitally. But, the morning that the Nalders were to leave, George, having opened one of his letters at the breakfast-table, asked to be excused, and hurriedly left the room. He just reappeared to see the Nalders into their carriage, and then he looked so wan, and so wild, and so horribly guilty, that Gerty saw it all. That woman had proposed to him in that letter to go off with her!

Her silliness would have been hardly worth dwelling on, if it had not led to a certain course of action. She said to herself, "I will save him. I will get that letter from him and read it, and then tell him I know all, and throw myself on his breast." We shall see how she succeeded.

George was very often very late up to bed; to-night he was later than usual. "Could he be *gone?*" thought Gerty. She hastily rose, and, wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, she went swiftly and silently down stairs. Though her beautiful little ivory feet were bare upon the cold polished oak staircase, she heeded not, but, passing on from patch to patch of bright moonlight, paused breathless at the library door, and listened.

The little woman wanted neither for cunning of a sort, nor for courage of a sort. A girl, whose first lesson was that her life and honor were in her own keeping, and that on occasions it might become necessary for her to shoot a man down with no more hesitation than would be felt in killing a beetle, might be supposed to have imbibed some small portion of these faculties. She therefore calculated her chances quite coolly.

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George was there, talking to himself. If his back were towards her, the noise he made might enable her to open the door without being heard. If he saw her, why then she had merely come to coax him up stairs. She opened the door stealthily and passed in, quite unnoticed. George was sitting before the escritoire, — the same one in which his father's will had been kept. He had a revolver beside him, and was reading a letter, — a very long letter of many sheets, — the letter of that morning, — and every now and then uttering a fierce oath or exclamation.

She slid behind a curtain and watched. She wanted to know where he would put the letter. She was undetermined how to act, and was beginning to think whether it would not be better to open the door suddenly and come laughing in, as if by accident, when, as she stood barefooted and breathless behind her curtain watching her husband reading the letter which she believed to be from Mrs. Nalder, her cunning little eye made a discovery. There was one drawer of the secretary open, — one of the secret drawers, which she had seen open frequently, and knew the trick of perfectly, as did probably every one who had once looked at it for an instant. It seemed so evident to her that George had taken Mrs. Nalder's letter from that drawer, and so certain that he would put it back there again, that she was quite satisfied to wait no longer, and so stole silently and successfully out of the room once more; and, when George came up to bed soon after, she appeared to awake with a sweet smile. "Good heavens!" she said to herself, "he looks like death."

And he looked like death in the morning. He was so absolutely silent that he seemed to be possessed of a dumb devil, and he looked utterly scared and terrified. She heard him give orders to the pad groom, which showed that he was going out, but would be home to lunch. She asked him where he was going, and he simply answered, "To Croydon."

His horse's feet were barely silent in the yard, when she was at the old secretary. The drawer was opened, and the letter was in her hand before George was out of the park. At the first glance at it, she saw that it was not from Mrs. Nalder, or from any woman, but was written in a man's hand. When she saw this, her conscience pricked her for one moment. It was not a secret in her department. She had a right to open a woman's letter to her husband, but she had no right here. Curiosity prevailed, and she sat down and read the letter we give in the next chapter. It is hard to say how much she understood of it, but quite enough to make her hastily replace it in the drawer; to stand for an instant stupefied with horror, and then to rush wildly up stairs, seize baby to her bosom, and turn round, her eyes gleaming with the ferocity of sheer terror, at bay against the enemy.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

THE LETTER, WHICH WAS NOT FROM MRS. NALDER.

"SIR, — I am about to write to you the longest letter which I have ever written in my life, and, I make bold to say, one of the strangest letters ever written by one man to another.

"Sir George, you will find me, in this letter, assuming an indignant and injured tone; and at first you will laugh at such an idea, — at the idea of a man so deeply steeped in crime as I am having any right to feel injury or injustice; but you will not laugh at the end, Sir George. If your better feelings don't prevent you doing that, what I have to tell you will put you into no laughing mood.

"Who ruined me, sir? Who brought me, a silly and impressible young man, into that hell of infamy, which was called a private tutor's? Was I ever a greater scoundrel than Mottesfont, who forged his own father's name; was I ever so great a blackguard as Parkins? No. I should have been cobbed in the hulks if I had been. Why, the only honest man in that miserable house when we first went there (save our two selves) was the poor old idiot of a tutor, who knew no more of the antecedents of his two pupils than your father did.

"And then did not I see you, the handsome merry young gentleman whom I followed for good-will and admiration, laughing at them, seeming to admire them, and thinking them fast fellows, and teaching me to do the same? Was not I made minister of your vice? And, lastly, Sir George Hillyar, — I am going to speak out, — when I saw you, the young gentleman I admired and looked up to, when I saw you, — I can say it to-day after what I know now, — Forge, can you be the man to cast a robbery in my teeth? Am I worse than you?"

(Sir George had lit a cigar when he had read so far. "Is that the little game?" he said. "The man's brain is softening. Why, old Morton, the keeper, knows all about that. But there is a lot more in reserve; three or four pages. Now I *do* wonder how he is going to try and raise the wind out of me. He is a fool for mentioning that old business, because it will only make me angry, and he can't appear without being packed off to the colony in irons for life. Oh, here is more sentimentality, hey?")

"Knowing all I have known, Sir George, have I ever at-

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tempted to trade on it? Never. Have n't I, rogue, wretch, and dog, as I am, with hell begun in this world for me, — have n't I been faithful and true to you? What did I ever have from you before that thirty pounds you gave me in Palmerston last year? You surely owed me as much as that; you surely owed Julia's husband as much as that. You received me then like a villain and a thief. I came to you humbly, and was glad to see your face again, for your face was dear to me till last night, Sir George. And you broke out on me, and bullied me, assuming that I was going to swindle you.

"If it had n't been for the reception you gave me then I would never have deceived you, and come to England. I would have stopped at Perth; for the tale I told you was true; but the wind was fair, and I was angry with you, and old England was before me, and so I did not go on shore. What have I done which warrants *you* in doing what you have done to me? Sir George Hillyar, sir, a master scoundrel like me knows as much or more than a leading detective. *You* know that. Last night, Sir George, it came to my knowledge that you had offered two hundred guineas for my apprehension."

("Confound the fellow, I wonder how he found that out," said Sir George. "How very singular it is his trying to take me in with these protestations of affection. I thought him shrewder. I must have him though. I am sorry to a certain extent for the poor devil, but he must stand in the dock. All that he chooses to say about the past there will go for nothing; he will be only rebuked by the court. But if he goes at large he may take to anonymous letter-writing, or something of that kind. And he really does know too much. That 's what Morton, the keeper, so sensibly said, when he advised me to do it. Yes, let him say what he has got to say in the dock, in the character of a returned convict.")

"That is to say, Sir George, in sheer unthinking cowardice, or else because you wished to stamp all I had to say as the insane charges of a desperate man, you deliberately condemned me, who had never harmed you, to a fate infinitely more horrible than death, — to the iron gang for life; calculating, as I have very little doubt, — for you as a police inspector know the convict world somewhat, — on my suicide. Now Sir George, who is the greatest villain of us two? Now, have I not got a case against you?"

(Sir George's face darkened, and he looked uneasy. "This fellow is getting dangerous. But I shall have him to-night?")

"Now, Sir George, please attend to me, and I will tell you a story, — a story which will interest you very deeply. I wish first of all, my dear sir, — in order to quicken your curiosity, —

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to allude to the set of sapphires valued at some eight hundred pounds, and the set of cameos valued at nearly two thousand pounds, which, to Mr. Compton's great surprise, were NOT found among your late father's effects at his most lamented demise. Do you remember discovering, while Mr. Compton and you were arranging papers, in the very front of the old black secretary, a bundle of pink and highly-scented love-letters, written in an elegant lady's hand, addressed to your father, and signed 'Mary?' The one, unless I forget, which contained the tress of auburn hair, was the one in which Mary thanked her dearest old Georgy Poggy for the *beautiful, beautiful* set of blue stones; and the one in which was the sprig of Cape jessamine was full of warm expressions of gratitude for the noble, the princely present of the cameos. I admire the respect which you and Mr. Compton showed for the memory of your late father, in saying nothing about the love-letters, and in letting the sapphires and cameos go quietly to the devil. A scandalous *liaison* in a man of your late father's age is best kept quiet. It is not respectable."

("How the deuse did he find *this* out?" said George.)

"Now, my dear sir, I beg to inform you that your dear father was utterly innocent of this 'affair.' He always was a very clean liver, was Sir George. I 'll speak up for him, because he seems bitterly to have felt that he had n't done his duty by me, and was in some sort answerable for my misdemeanors, in sending me to that den of iniquity in your company. But about these love-letters; they were written, under my direction, by a young female of good education, but who, unhappily, knows pretty near as much of the inside of Newgate as she does of the outside; they were put in that escritoire by my own hand, ready for you to find them. And, as for the sapphires and cameos, why I stole them, sold them, have got the money, and am going into business with it in Palmerston."

("The deuse you are," said George. "Is he mad? or is there something coming? I must have some brandy. I am frightened." He drank half a tumbler of brandy, and then went on with the letter.)

"If you ask me how, I will tell you. Lay down this letter a moment, take a table-knife, go outside of the pantry window (a latticed one, as you will remember), and raise the latch with the knife; that will explain a great deal to you. I resume.

"I came on to England, as you know, and we had to beat up for Rio, leaky. From thence I wrote by the *Tay* steamer to my son Reuben, telling him to look out for me. That noble lad, sir, was as true as steel. He was living at the top of my cousin's house at Chelsea, and he took me in at every risk, and was most

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faithful and dutiful. Use that boy well, Sir George, and it shall be well with you.

"You know what I got involved in there. I began to see that there were some in that business far too clumsy for *me*, and I tried to get out of it. I thought of Stanlake. I had robbed the house once, and I meant to do it again. I knew what a terrible lot of property there was loose in that house. I began getting into that house through the pantry window; I got in, first and last, eight times.

"I knew enough to know that the black escritoire was my mark, and I worked at that. I found out your father's trick of sitting up, and dozing off uneasily, and it was the cause of much danger to me. I have been in the room with him several times when he was snoring and dozing in his chair, before I could get a chance at the lock, and then I failed the first time. The next night I came with other skeleton keys and got it open. That night I got the sapphires and the cameos, which I have seen your mother wear often, Sir George; and the next morning, Reuben being safe at Stanlake, I wrote to the police, and laid them on to the crib at Church Place, Chelsea."

("Are there two devils," said George, aghast, "or is this the true and only one.")

"Sir, you may have thought that near three thousand pounds was enough to content me, but it was not. I wanted the diamonds; the whole affair (I will not use thieves' Latin to you, sir) was so safe, and there was such an absolute certainty of impunity about it, that I felt a kind of triumph, not unmixed with amusement. I came back after the diamonds; and the night I came back after the diamonds was the very night your poor dear pa died."

(George was so sick and faint now that the brandy had but little effect on him, but after a time he went on.)

"That night, sir, I got in as usual with my boots in my pocket. Old Simpson was fast asleep in a chair in the little drawing-room as usual. I waited a long while outside the library door, longer than usual, until I heard Sir George snore; and then, at the very first sound of it, I passed quickly and safely in.

"He was sleeping very uneasily that night, sometimes snoring, and sometimes talking. I heard him mention Mr. Erne's name very often, and once or twice Mr. Erne's mother's name. Then he mentioned your name, sir, and he said more than once, 'Poor George! Poor dear George!' to my great surprise, as you may suppose.

"Then I looked at the secretary, and it was open; and on the desk of it was lying a deed. I stepped up, and saw it was his will. I opened it, and read it, for it was very short. Eight

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thousand a year to Mr. Erne, and Stanlake to you. I had just heard him say, 'Poor dear George!' in his sleep; and I thought of you sir, — before God I did, unkind as you had been to me. I said, If I put this in my pocket, he must make a new one, and then it may be better for 'Poor dear George.' And, as I thought that, I heard a noise and looked up, and saw that he had silently awaked, had caught up a sword from the rack over the fire-place, and was close on me.

"He was very unsteady, and looked very ghastly, but he recognized me in an instant, and called me by my name. I easily eluded him, and made swiftly for the door, — he catching up the candle and following me down the passage, calling out in the most awful voice for Reuben to come and help him.

"I made for the kitchen, and he after me, quicker than I reckoned on. The kitchen was so dark that I got confused among the furniture, and began to get frightened, and think that I had gone too far in my rashness. Before I could clear out of it, he came reeling in, and saw me again. He threw his sword at me, and fell heavily down, putting out the light.

"I was in the pantry, and at the window in one moment. As I got it open, I knocked down some glasses, and at the same moment heard Simpson in the kitchen shouting for help.

"I was deeply grieved on hearing next day that your poor pa was found dead. It is very dreadful to be took off like that in a moment of anger; called to your last account suddenly in an uncharitable frame of mind, without one moment given for repentance or prayer. I thank Heaven that I can lay my hand on my heart at this moment, and say that I am in peace and charity with all men, and can await my summons hence calmly, and without anxiety. *My* spiritual affairs are in perfect order, Sir George. Oh, that you too would take warning before it is too late!

"And now, with regard to my worldly affairs, Sir George. I am sorry to trouble you, but I must have those traps took off my trail immediate, if you please. You will, of course, lose no time about *that*, seeing that, should anything happen to me, of course Mr. Erne would immediately come into four-fifths of your income, with a claim for a year's rents. In short, Sir George, I have it in my power to ruin you utterly and irretrievably; and, when it came to my knowledge last night that you, having heard of my return from France, had set the traps upon me, I got in such a fury that *I was half-way to Compton's office with it* before I could think what I was about. If it had been half-a-mile nearer, you would have been lost. You know what my temper is at times, and you must be very careful.

"This is all I have to trouble you with at present. I am not

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in want of any pecuniary assistance. My affairs are, on the whole, prosperous. I shall, by retaining possession of your father's will, render our interests identical. Meanwhile, sir, I thank you for your kindness to my son Reuben. You will never have a hard bargain to drive with me as long as you are kind to him."

CHAPTER XLVII

SIR GEORGE HILLYAR STARTS ON HIS ADVENTURE.

One scarcely likes to look too closely into the volcano of terror and fury which began to heave and gleam in Sir George Hillyar's mind when he read this. The biscuit-like walls of old craters stand up for centuries, heaving beautiful, scornful pinnacles aloft into the blue of heaven; and the grass grows on the old flame-eaten, vitrified rocks, in the holes of which the native cats and copper lizards live and squabble, and say things behind one another's backs; and people have pic-nics there; and lost sheep feed there, and waken strange startling echoes in the dead silence of the summer noon by their solitary bleat; and the eagle comes sometimes and throws his swift passing shadow across the short grass; and all goes on peacefully, until folks notice that a white, round-topped cloud hangs high aloft over the hill, and stays there; and then some one says that the cloud is red at night on the lower edge; and then some fine morning down slides the lip of the old crater, crash, in unutterable ruin, and away comes the great lava stream hissing through the vineyards, and hell is broken loose once more.

So now the bank of loose *scoriæ*, — now, alas! a thing of the past, — which had been built up by time, by want of temptation, by his love of his wife, by the company of such people as the Oxtons, by desire for the applause of society, round the seething fire which existed in George Hillyar, and which some say — and who is he bold enough to deny it? — is in all of us, had broken down utterly.

Suddenly, when at the height of prosperity, a prosperous gentleman, just winning his way into thorough recognition from the world, after all he had gone through; at this very moment he found his fortune and reputation in the hands of a thrice-convicted, self-accused, hypocritical villain. He knew that he was

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not safe for a moment; and he knew that, should this man use his power, he had only one remedy — suicide.

For, in the first place, he had thoroughly persuaded himself of the utter lowness of Erne's character, — that he had no mercy to expect from him; and, should his father's will be produced, he would be awfully in Erne's debt even now. And next, he would sooner, far sooner, after what had passed, put a pistol to his head and draw the trigger than ask for it. Sir George Hillyar was a great scoundrel, but physically he was not a coward. Barker's Gap showed that to the astonished Secretary Oxton. He would still prefer death to what he chose to consider disgrace.

He had been using the wealth which he considered his very freely, with a view to reinstate himself into society, and had to a certain extent succeeded. Tasteful extravagance, which he had taken to as a means to that end, had now become a necessity to him; and, moreover, here, as in Australia, he had made many enemies by his manner. He could not and would not endure disgrace and ruin before these men. He placed the alternative of suicide most plainly before him.

The alternative! Then there was another? Yes, but one best not spoken about. A bird of the air would carry some matters.

At first he broke into most ungovernable, frantic rage, and broke his hand against the mantel-piece; but by degrees his passion grew more still and more intense, and his resolution, whatever it was, became fixed.

George Hillyar had not one friend in the world, unless you could call the old gamekeeper one. His love for his silly wife had long been on the wane, and was now utterly swept away and lost in this terrible deluge. Nay, Gerty had reason enough for jealousy, had she looked in the right direction. He would have been utterly alone, on a terrible Stylites column of selfishness, built up, stone by stone, through a misspent life, had it not been for one single person. His heart was closed entirely towards every member of his species save one, — his illegitimate son Reuben.

And so strangely had matters arranged themselves, that this affection was shared by his bitterest enemy, the partner of his crimes. The one link between these two men, which did not seem of the devil's forging, was their kindly feeling towards this young man Reuben, whom each believed to be his son. And George's first resolution was to claim paternity in Reuben himself, lest Reuben, believing Samuel Burton to be his father, should interfere in any way with his plans.

For George was right, as I dare say you have already guessed.

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Reuben *was* George's son. The poor woman, Samuel's wife, utterly deserted and alone in the world, lost her youngest child, and was left with Reuben only. And, when she saw Morton the keeper, she suspected that the family wanted to get him from her; and so she lied about it, and said it was the eldest who was dead. For this child was all she had left in the world; name, health, character, all were gone. Nothing was left but this pretty one; and, if she parted from that, there was nothing left but the river. She easily put simple old Morton off his quest, and was left in peace. A selfish woman, — to stand wilfully between her child and worldly advancement! And yet her conduct seems to shine out of the dreadful darkness of the whole transaction, on which I have so slightly touched, as a gleam from a higher and purer region.

Old Sir George Hillyar had seen the likeness in an instant, and had determined to *know nothing whatever*, but to do what he considered his duty by Reuben, — which seems fully to account for his conduct to Reuben, and to George also; for when the kind old man (he was in his way *very* kind) saw, or thought he saw, that George had recognized his unfortunate offspring, and that his heart was moved towards him, then the old man's heart was softened, towards both father and son. He probably felt the same repugnance as I do to handle or examine a very ugly business.

Reuben, as soon as he had accepted Sir George Hillyar's protection, had been made under-keeper at Stanlake, and had been put under old Morton to learn his duties. Old Morton saw nothing strange in the attention that Sir George paid to this young man. Reuben was the favorite of the day, as he had been once. He admired Reuben, and rather flattered him. The old dog, if he is of a good breed, is quite contented with half the hearth-rug in his old age; particularly when the young dog is so affectionately deferential as was the young dog Reuben. Reuben would sometimes call him "old cock," — which was low; but then he submitted so gently to the old man's courtly reproofs; and, besides, his reckless and desperate gallantry in the matter of poachers more than outbalanced any slight lowness and slanginess of language of which Morton might have to complain. Morton took to Reuben, and Reuben took most heartily to his trade.

At this time also Reuben began to exhibit that fondness for decorating his person which afterwards caused him to develope into — but we anticipate. So that the Reuben who stood before Sir George Hillyar in the library an hour or two after the arrival of that dreadful letter, was, so to speak, the very pink, tulip, or abstract ideal of all dandy game-keepers, without being a bit overdressed or theatrical. A clean, dapper, good-humored, innocent young fellow, with a pleasant open face which won your good

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will at once. He was strangely in contrast with his dark-browed father, and seemed an odd figure to find in that sink of guilt into which he was getting drawn.

"Reuben," said Sir George, quietly, "come here."

Reuben came up, and Sir George took his hand. "Look at me," he said. "Do I look as if I was mad?"

He certainly did not. Those steady, resolute eyes shone out of no madman's head. Reuben, wondering, said emphatically, "No."

"Have I ever appeared mad in your eyes? Have I ever seemed to you to act on suddenly-formed resolutions, — to pursue a very important course of action without due reason?"

Reuben, getting more puzzled yet, answered, "Certainly not, sir."

"Then should you think me a madman if I told you that I was your father?"

Reuben started and turned pale. He was utterly unprepared for this. His facile face assumed a look of painful anxiety, and he stood with half-opened mouth, waiting for Sir George to go on, evidently only half understanding what he had said already.

"Such is the case," he went on. "Do not ask me for the proofs, my poor boy, but believe me. Does not nature, does not your heart, tell you that I am right, as they both do me?"

Reuben looked at him one moment, and then said, wondering, "Father! My father!"

Sir George mistook the tone in which Reuben spoke. He thought that Reuben spoke in affectionate recognition of his claims, whereas it was simply an ejaculation of wonder. It was the first time that any one had ever called him by the sacred old name, and he felt a strange pleasure in it. Gerty's boy used to call him papa; how sickly and artificial it sounded after "father!" He paused an instant, and then went on, —

"Yes; I am your father, Reuben. Remember that. Impress that on your mind. There is no possibility of a doubt of it. Keep that steadily before you through everything. I have been a bad father to you, but you must forgive and forget all that."

"I have never had anything but kindness from you, sir," said Reuben.

"You have had very little of it, my poor boy. Never mind; there is time enough to mend all that. Now I have had, as you may suppose, a very distinct object in making this startling announcement to you this day above all others, for my conduct to you must show you that I have known the secret a long time."

Reuben assented, and began to look on his new-found father with more interest as his mind took in the facts of the case.

"Now," continued Sir George, "that treble-dyed, unmitigated

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villain, who used to pretend that you were his son, — that Samuel Burton and I are at deadly variance, and I have made this announcement to you, in order that you may know which side you ought to take, should you unhappily be called on to choose, which God forbid. I have nothing more to say to you. Come to me here at twelve o'clock to-morrow morning, for I am going a long and weary journey, and I want to say good-bye to you before I go."

"May not I go with you, sir?" said Reuben, in a low and husky voice. "I would be very faithful —"

"No, no!" said Sir George, somewhat wildly. "On any other journey but this, my boy. Stay at home, and keep watch over Lady Hillyar. I will write secretly to you, and you must do the same to me. Now go."

So the next day at noon, on George's return from Croydon, he found Reuben waiting for him; and he gave him a few instructions in the library, and bade him wait in the courtyard to see the last of him.

Meanwhile Gerty had sat still in her dressing-room, with the child on her bosom, in the same state of stupid horror into which she had fallen on reading the terrible letter, — utterly unable to realize her position, or decide on any line of action. But now she rose up, for she heard George's foot on the stair, and heard his voice, his kindest voice, crying, "Gerty! Gerty!" But she did not answer; and George, opening the door of the room, was surprised to see her standing there, pale and wan, with the terror which yesterday had been on his face reflected on hers.

"Gerty, are you ill?"

"Yes, George; I think I am ill. No, I am not ill. I am nervous. Nothing more."

"Gerty," said George, "I am going away."

"Yes, George."

"For a long time, — a very long time."

"Yes, George. Am I to come?"

"No; you must stay where you are."

"Very well. Are you going to Australia?"

"No; to Paris first, and God only knows where afterwards."

"If you go to Vienna, I wish you would get me a set of buttons like Lady Bricbracks. They are not very dear; but no one else has got them, and I should like to annoy her."

"Very well," said George. "Good-bye."

She kissed him, — a cold little kiss, — and he was gone. "And she can part from me like *that*," said poor George, bitterly, little dreaming how much she knew.

But she went to the window, for she knew that she could see him ride across a certain piece of glade in the park a long distance

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off. She had often watched for him here. It reminded her of the first time she had ever seen him, at the Barkers'. They had made him out a long distance off by his careless, graceful seat, and had said, "That is Hillyar." So she had seen him the first time four years before, when he had come riding to woo; so she saw him now for the last time forever.

She saw the familiar old figure ride slowly across the open space in the distance and disappear; and she felt that she loved him still, and burst out wildly weeping, and cried out vainly, "George! George! come back to me, darling! and I will love you all the same!" A vain, vain cry. He passed out of her sight and was gone forever.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE FORGE IS LIT UP ONCE MORE.

I HAVE no doubt that I should have been very much astonished by everything I saw, when I first found solid ground under my feet, and looked round to take my first view of Australia. I was prepared for any amount of astonishment: I will go further, I was *determined* to be astonished. But it was no good. The very first thing I saw, on the wharf, was Mrs. Bill Avery, in a blue cloth habit, with a low-crowned hat and feather, riding a three-quarters bred horse, and accompanied by a new, but devoted husband, in breeches, butcher's boots, a white coat, and a cabbage-tree hat!

That cured me of wondering. I pointed her out to my mother, and she gave utterance to the remarkable expressions which I have described her as using, when I mentioned this wonderful *rencontre* almost at the beginning of my narrative: in addition to which, as I now remember, she said that you might knock her down with a feather, — which must be considered as a trope, or figure of speech, because I never saw a woman of any size or age stronger on her legs than my mother.

Yes, the sight of Mrs. Bill Avery, *that was* "a cockhorse," as Fred expressed it in his vigorous English, took all the wondering faculty out of me for a long time, or I should have wondered at many things; such as, why I should have begun thinking of a liberal and elegant caricature I had in my possession, of the Pope of Rome being fried in a frying-pan, and the Devil peppering

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him out of a pepper-box; but this was not very wonderful, considering that the thermometer stood 120° in the shade, that it was blowing half a gale from the northward, and that the flying dust was as big as peas.

I might have wondered why Mr. Secretary Oxton, that great and awful personage, sat upon the shafts of an empty dray, just as you or I might have done; and why, since he was so very glad to see Messrs. Dawson, Pollifex, and Morton, he did n't get up and come forward to shake hands with them, but contented himself by bellowing out welcomes to them from a distance from under his white umbrella; and why those three gentlemen, the moment they had shaken hands with him, and with Erne the moment they were introduced to him, sat down instantly, as though it were a breach of etiquette to stand on your feet. Why, once more, I felt exactly as though I had been doing a hard day's work on a hot day in August, whereas I had only stepped out of a boat, and given a hand, among ten more, to moving our things into a pile on the wharf. Why did I feel contented and stupid and idle, although the sand was filling my eyes and ears?

Moreover, although I am now accustomed to the effects of a northerly wind, I wonder to this day why I was n't surprised at this.

There approached us rapidly along the wharf a very tall and very handsome lady, dressed most beautifully, who bore down on us, followed by two laboring men, whom I knew, in an instant, by their faces, to be Irishmen. This lady pointed out us and our baggage to the Irishmen, who immediately began taking it away piece by piece on a truck, without one single word, while the lady stood and looked at us complacently. We did not interfere. It was probably all right. It might be, or might not be; but, after Mrs. Bill Avery in a hat and feathers, on a high-stepping horse, the laws of right and wrong, hitherto supposed to be fixed and immutable principles, had become of more than questionable validity. Here, in this country, with this hot wind, it might be the duty of these Irishmen to steal our luggage, and we might be culpably neglecting ours by not aiding and abetting them. If you think I am talking nonsense, try the utter bodily and moral prostration which is induced by a heat of 125° in the shade, and the spectacle of a convict driving by in a carriage and pair.

The lady stood and looked at Emma, my mother, and myself, sole guardians of the luggage, except the children and Martha, with infinite contentment. Once she turned to one of the Irishmen, and said, "Tim, ye'd best tell Mrs. Dempsey that she'd better hurry and get their tay ready for um," but then she resumed her gaze, and I noticed that Emma seemed to meet her views amazingly. At last she spoke.

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"Your brother Joe would like to see the prorogun, may be, my dear. I'll get um an order from James Oxton or some of 'em, if he's on shore in time. It's lucky I got Gerty's letter overland, or I'd not have expected you, and ye'd have had to go to the barx."

I soon understood the state of affairs. Lady Hillyar had written to the lady before us, "Miss Burke"; and she had taken a house for us, and had taken as much pains to make everything comfortable for our reception as if we were her own relations. When Joe's abilities were appreciated, and the battle royal was fought, our intimate relations with the Irish party, to most of whom we were bound by ties of gratitude for many kindnesses, — kindnesses we should never have received but for the affectionate devotion of this good woman towards the friends of all those whom she had ever loved, — enabled both Joe and myself to take a political position which would otherwise have been impossible.

But we are still on the wharf. I waited until every chattel had been carried off by the Irishmen, and saw my mother, Emma, and the children carried off in triumph by Miss Burke, who insisted on leading Fred and carrying his horse (or rather what remained of it, for the head and neck, tail, and one leg had been lost overboard at various times, and the stand and wheels were now used for a cart); and I prepared to wait in the dust and sun until my father, Joe, Trevethick, and Tom Williams should come ashore in the next boat. But, the moment I was alone, Erne came and led me up to the empty wool-dray, in which the leading Conservative talent of the colony had seated itself under umbrellas.

"Don't tell me," the Honorable Mr. Dawson was saying energetically, "I tell you, Oxton, that *this* is the stuff we want. *I* don't hold with assisted emigration. Look at that lad before you, and talk to me of labor. *I* say, breed it. Take and breed your labor for yourself. That's his sweetheart going along the wharf now with old Lesbia Burke, carrying a bundle of shawls and an umbrella. Take and breed your labor for yourself."

This was reassuring and pleasant for a modest youth of nineteen standing alone before four grand gentlemen. I was relieved to find that the discussion was so warm that I was only noticed by a kindly nod. Mr. Oxton said, in a voice I now heard for the first time, — a clear sharp voice, yet not wanting in what the singers call, I believe, "timbre" by any means:

"I tell you, Dawson, that I will not yield to this factious Irish cry. Every farthing of the land money which I can spare from public works shall go to the development of the resources of the colony by an artificial importation of labor. Dixi."

"Very good," said Dawson, "I did hope to find you more

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reasonable. Hang the resources of the colony! Wool is the proper resource of the colony. I want skilled labor kep up and unskilled labor kep down. A nice thing for the squatters if mines were found here, — and mines there are, as sure as you 're born. Why, I tell you, — for we 're all squatters here together, — that I 've got a piece of copper under my bed — down south — I won't mention names — as big as a quart bottle. If that was to get wind among any Cornish roughs, you 'd have shepherd's wages up to fifty pounds in a year. I don't want development; I want ——"

"What suits your pocket, old fellow," said Mr. Oxton, laughing. "Man, I made this colony, and I 'll stick by it. These clever Irishmen are merely raising this cry for high-priced labor and cheap land to get me out, and themselves and their friends in. I *will not* interfere in the price of labor by legislation ——"

"Right toorul loorul," sang the light-hearted Mr. Morton, speaking for the first time; "and so my sweet brother-in-law spends the capital of the colony by flooding the labor market with all the uncriminal offscourings of Old England. I thank heaven *I* never laid claims to consistency."

"Jack, you 're a fool," said Mr. Oxton. "Capital invested in importing labor pays a higher interest than that invested in any other way, even if one leaves out the question of human happiness ——"

"Oh!" said the Honorable Mr. Dawson, "if you 're drove to human happiness, you 'd best make a coalition of it with Phelim O'Ryan, and have done. I 'm not a-going to rat. I 'll stick by you faithful, James Oxton. But I did *not* expect to have my stomach turned with *that*."

"Well," said the Secretary, "there 's one more session ended, and I am not out yet. Come, it is full time to get towards the house. Is this the young man that Lady Hillyar speaks of, Mr. Hillyar?"

"Oh dear no," said Erne; "this is my friend Jim. It is his brother Joe she means."

"Then perhaps you will take charge of this for your brother, Burton. If you are in by half-past four it will do. Good morning."

And so the four statesmen rose by degrees, and walked away very slowly, under their umbrellas, along the wharf; never one of them venturing to make a remark without stopping and leaning against the wall for support. If it became necessary to reply, the other three would also at once support themselves against the wall until the argument was finished. After which they would go slowly forward again.

I found that the paper I held in my hand was an order for two

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persons to be admitted into the Gallery of the House of Assembly, to witness the ceremony which Miss Burke had called the "prorogun." It appeared, as Erne afterwards told me, that that most good-natured little lady, Lady Hillyar, had written to Mr. Oxton about Joe especially, telling him of his fancy for political life, and his disappointment owing to Sir George Hillyar's sudden death. She begged her dear James to make them elect him into the Assembly immediately, as he was as much fit to be there as that dear, kind old stupid Dawson (by whom she meant my friend, the Hon. Mr. D.) was to be in the Council. Mr. Oxton could not quite do all she asked; but, for his dear Gerty's sake, he did all he could at present, — gave Joe and myself a ticket for the prorogation of the Houses.

The instant that the rest of our party got on shore with the remainder of our things, I pounced on Joe, and showed him the order. The weary, patient look which had been in his face ever since his disappointment, — and which, I had seen with regret, had only deepened through the confinement and inertness of the voyage, — gave way at once to a brighter and more eager look, as I explained to him what kind Mr. Oxton had done for him.

"Jim, dear," he said, taking my arm, "I like this as well as if any one had given me ten pounds. I want to see these colonial parliaments at work. I would sooner it had been a debate; but I can see the class of men they have got, at all events. Let us come on at once, and get a good place."

So we packed off together along the wharf; and I, not being so profoundly impressed with anticipation of the majestic spectacle of representative government which we were about to witness as was Joe, had time to look about me and observe. And I could observe the better, because the fierce hot north wind, which all the morning had made the town like a dusty brickfield, had given place to an icy blast from the south, off the sea, which made one shiver again, but which was not strong enough to move the heaps of dust which lay piled, like yellow snow-wreaths at each street corner, ready for another devil's dance, to begin punctually at nine the next morning.

The town was of magnificent proportions, as any one who has been at Palmerston within the last six years will readily allow; but, at the time I am speaking of, the houses did not happen (with trifling exceptions) to be built. Nevertheless, the streets were wide and commodious, calculated for an immense amount of traffic had the stumps of the old gum-trees been moved, which they wern't.

There was a row of fine warehouses, built solidly with freestone, along the wharf; but, after one had got back from the

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wharf, up the gentle rise on which the town stands, Palmerston might at that time be pronounced a patchy metropolis. At every street-corner there was a handsome building; but there were long gaps between each one and the next, occupied by half-acre lots, on which stood tenements of wood, galvanized iron, and tin, at all possible distances and at all possible angles from the main thoroughfare. As an instance, on the half-acre lot next to the branch of the Bank of New South Wales, a handsome Doric building, the proprietor had erected a slab hut, barkroofed, lying at an angle of say 35° to the street. At the further end of this, and connected with it, was a dirty old tent, standing at an angle of 35° to the slab hut. In the corner formed by these two buildings was a big dog, who lived in a tin packing case, and mortified himself by bringing blood against the sharp edges of it every time he went in and out; and who now, after the manner of the Easterns, had gone up on to the flat roof of his house in the cool of the evening, and was surveying the world. All the place was strewed with sheepskins; and in front of all, close to the road, was an umbrella-tent, lined with green baize, in which sat the proprietor's wife, with her shoes off, casting up accounts in an old vellum book. From the general look of the place, I concluded that its owner was a fellmonger, and habitually addicted to the use of strong waters. Being thrown against him in the way of business a short time after, I was delighted to find that I was right in both particulars.

I don't know that this was the queerest establishment which I noticed that day. I think not; but I give it as a specimen, because the Bank of New South Wales stands near the top of the hill; and, when you top that hill, you are among the noble group of Government buildings, and from among them you look down over the police paddock on to the Sturt river again, which has made a sudden bend and come round to your feet. You see Government House, nobly situated on the opposite hill, and below you observe "The Bend," Hon. J. Oxton's place, and many other buildings. But, more than all, looking westward, you see Australia, — Australia as it is, strange to say, from Cape Otway to Port Essington, more or less, — endless rolling wolds of yellow grass, alternated with long, dark, melancholy bands of colorless forest.

"Joe!" I said, catching his arm, "Joe! look at that."

"At what?"

"Why, at *that*. That's *it*."

"That's what? old man," said Joe.

"Why, *it*. The country. Australey. Lord A'mighty, ain't it awful to look at?"

"Only plains and woods, Jim," said Joe, wondering. "It is not beautiful, and I don't see anything awful in it."

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"But it's so lonely," I urged. "Does any one ever go out yonder, over those plains? Does any one live over there?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Joe, carelessly. "Oh yes, and miles beyond that. Come, let us get our places."

The House of Assembly, — the Commons of the Colony, — was the prettiest among all the pretty group of Government buildings, and most commodiously arranged inside also, with an excellent gallery. As soon as we were seated, having about half an hour to wait, I began thinking of that desolate, wild-looking landscape I had just seen, — thinking by what wonderful accident it came about that all the crime of the old country should have been sent for so many years to run riot in such a country as *that*. I could understand now, how any mind, brooding too long in solitude, miles away from company, among dark forests or still more dreary plains, like these, might madden itself; and also began to understand how the convict mind under those circumstances sometimes burst forth with sudden volcanic fury, and devoured everything. "Fancy a man," I said to myself, "taking the knowledge of some intolerable wrong into those woods with him, to nurse it until ——" And I began to see what had led my thoughts this way almost unconsciously, for beside me was sitting the man I had seen with Mrs. Avery.

I confess that I felt a most eager curiosity to know something about this man. He was a good-looking fellow, about thirty or thereabout, with a very brown complexion, very bold eyes, and a somewhat reckless look about him. Now and afterwards I found out that he was a native of the colony, a very great stock-rider, and was principal overseer to Mr. Charles Morton.

He was easily accessible, for he began the conversation. He talked for a considerable time, and of course he began to talk about horses. This was what I wanted. I said, I thought I saw him riding that morning on the wharf. He fell into my trap, and said Yes, he had been riding there with his wife.

I was very much shocked indeed; but I had not much time to think about it, for two ushers, coming in, announced his Excellency and the members of the Council. And enter his Excellency at the upper end of the room, resplendent in full uniform, accompanied by the commandant of the forces, and Mr. Midshipman Jacks, — which latter young gentleman had, I regret to say, mischievously lent himself to an intrigue of the Opposition, and smuggled himself in at his Excellency's coat-tails, to spoil the effect. Close behind the Governor, however, came no less than sixteen of the members of the Council, headed by Mr. Secretary Oxton. And a nobler-looking set of fellows I have seldom seen together. My friend, the Hon. Mr. Dawson, was not quite so much at his ease as I could have wished him to be.

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He turned round whenever he coughed, and did it humbly behind his hand. He also opened the ceremony by dropping his hat, — a tall, white, hairy one, like a Frenchman's, — which made a hollow sound when it dropped, and rolled off the dais into the body of the hall, and was politely restored to him by the leader of the Opposition.

The members of the Assembly rose as the Governor and the Council came in. The Government members were below me; so I could not see them; but I had a good look at the Opposition, who were directly in front of me. The man who sat nearest the Speaker's chair was evidently the leader, — the terrible Mr. Phelim O'Ryan, James Oxton's bitter enemy, of whom we had heard so much on the voyage. I was prepared to hate this unprincipled demagogue, and probably should have done so, if I had n't looked at him. No man could look at Phely O'Ryan, that noble, handsome, Galway giant, and not begin to like him; and, if he got ten minutes' talk with you, — there. That is what makes the villain so dangerous.

Phelim O'Ryan is talented, well read, brave, witty, eloquent, and also one of the kindest and most generous of men. But, — well, I wish sometimes he would tell you what he was going to do beforehand. It might be convenient. Lad as I was, when I looked at him that day, I still had some dim consciousness that that handsome gentleman was capable of saying a little more than he meant. But I did not look at him long; for my eyes were suddenly riveted on the man who stood next, partly behind him, and, as I looked, whispered in his ear. A pale man, with a vastly tall, narrow forehead, great, eager eyes, and a gentle sweet face, — a face which would have won one at once, had it not been for a turn or twitch at the corner of his mouth, suggestive of vanity. A most singular-looking man, though you could hardly say why; for the simple reason that his singularity was caused by a combination of circumstances, possibly assisted by slight affectation in dress. I had just concentrated my attention on him, when Joe, who had been talking to his neighbor, caught my arm, and said, —

"Jim, do you see the man who is whispering to O'Ryan?"

I said, "I 'm looking at him."

"Do you know who he is?"

"I want to, most extra particular," I answered, "for a queerer card I never saw turned."

"Man!" said Joe, squeezing my arm, "that 's Dempsey. Dempsey, the great Irish rebel."

I said, "O, ho!" and had no eyes for any one else after this, but sat staring at the rebel with eager curiosity, or I might have wasted a glance on the man who stood next him, — Dr. Too-

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good, a big man of portly presence, about sixty, with a large red face, carefully shaved, and an immense powerful jaw; whose long white hair fell back over his coat collar. A man with a broad-brimmed hat, worn at the back of his head, loose black Quaker-like clothes, a wisp of a white tie round his neck with no collar, a Gampine umbrella, and big shoes. He is clever, honest, and wonderfully well-informed; but, what with always having a dozen irons in the fire at once, and being totally unable to keep a civil tongue in his head towards his scientific and political opponents, the dear Doctor has hitherto only succeeded in making a more or less considerable mess of it.

His Excellency congratulated both branches of the Legislature on the material and moral progress of the colony, which, if not so great as in some years, yet was still considerably in advance of others. Exports had slightly fallen off; but then, on the other hand, imports had slightly increased, principally in articles of luxury; and he need not remind them that a demand for such articles was a sure sign of general prosperity (to which Joe said, "O Lord!"). In consequence of the even balance of parties, the present Government had only carried through seven bills out of eleven, and although he would be the last man in the world to accuse the present Opposition of anything approaching to faction, yet still he saw with deep regret the rejection of such an exceedingly useful public measure as the Slaughter-house Act. However, the present Government had not chosen to make it a party question, and so he had nothing more to say. Crime had diminished, but, on the other hand, the public health had slightly deteriorated. He thanked them for their patient attention to their duties; and then he put on his cocked hat, and there was peace in Israel for six months.

I thought the speech rather too trivial for her Majesty's representative to deliver to what was really a most noble and impressive assembly, charged with the destinies of an infant nation. But Sir Richard Bostock knew what he was about, and so did the colony. Government had suffered several defeats in questions of public utility, which showed that the Opposition were factious and determined; and so they were nervous. But, on the other hand, Ministers had carried their seven best measures through, and so the Opposition were anxious also. The rejection of one more Government bill would probably have forced James Oxton to appeal to the country; in which case the Opposition, officered almost entirely by Irishmen, and working the elections with a vigor and unanimity which the other two nations never equal, would most likely have gained seats enough to bring in their great measure from the Ministerial benches, with some hopes of its being carried. Both parties were therefore

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watching one another like two fierce dogs, eager to be at one another's throats. Hence the ridiculously cautious speech of the Governor.

And what was this wonderful measure which the Radicals had determined to bring in at the first moment that there was the very slenderest hope of a majority? It was simply revolutionary, and involved interests absolutely gigantic. I will explain it very shortly. The area of the colony was 460,000 square miles, of which area 124,000 square miles were occupied by that singular aristocracy called squatters, men who rent vast tracts of land from Government for the depasturing of their flocks, at an almost nominal sum, subject to a tax of so much a head on their sheep and cattle. The Radicals proposed to throw the whole of the land open for selection on the American principle, at, if possible, five shillings an acre. Should they succeed in this, they would instantly follow by a Forty-acre Qualification Bill; and, were one single House to be elected on those principles, every one knew that manhood suffrage would follow in a year. It was really a great and noble question; and no one who looked and saw such giants as Oxton and Pollifex on the one side, and as O'Ryan, Dempsey, and Toogood on the other, could for a moment doubt that it would be a splendid and heroic quarrel right bravely fought out.

So thought I, as Joe and I walked along the street together, — he dragging his vast misshapen bulk along with sudden impatient jerks, gesticulating with his long arms and tossing his beautiful head up now and then as though he himself were in the forefront of the battle, as indeed he was in his imagination. And, when he turned round on me, and I saw that his face was flushed, and that his eyes were gleaming, and his close-set, Castlereagh mouth twitching with excitement, I said to myself, "There is a man fit to fight among the foremost of them, if they only knew."

Such were the people among whom, and the atmosphere in which, we strangely found ourselves. Though strange at first, it soon became quite familiar; and it is now without the slightest astonishment that I find our humble story, like the story of the life of every one in a very small community with liberal institutions, getting to some extent mixed up with the course of colonial politics.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

IN WHICH TWO BAD PENNIES COME BACK.

We stayed in the lodging which Miss Burke had so kindly found for us, in the Irish quarter of Palmerston, for a considerable time. We might have had quieter neighbors, I will allow; but it is impossible that we could have had kinder. We were free of the quarter, — nay more, under the protection of the quarter. No one ever offered to fight us; and, as for the noise, why I have heard noise enough in Lawrence-street, Chelsea, at times. We were quite used to that sort of thing, and got on most comfortably.

In some mysterious way our affairs seemed prospering, for I noticed that my father's calm, square face, so dear to me, so closely watched by me, grew brighter every day. The frequent interviews with the Hon. Mr. Dawson, seemed to afford him great satisfaction. At last he came home one night, and said that we should have to prepare ourselves to go over yonder in a few months. On its being clamorously demanded of him where that was, he merely replied, "Why, over yonder," and pointed to the right of the fire-place, in the direction, as I afterwards ascertained, of the South Pole.

My father was a great deal with Mr. Dawson now, and I and the rest of us guessed that Mr. Dawson was putting him in the way of some business. Tom Williams had got leave from my father to go to work with Trevittick at a forge in the town. I could have gone too, for I was fearful of getting behind in my work, and, though I was very very fond of Tom Williams, yet I should hardly have liked to have him pass me; but Mr. Dawson would not allow me to go to work. He negatived the proposition flatly, and got my father to back him, by some gross misrepresentation or another.

I have said that my father was a great deal with the Hon. Mr. Dawson, but I think I ought to say that I was a great deal more with him. Every night, or nearly every night, as soon as it was dark, Mr. Dawson would come to our house and ask for me, and then he and I would go out alone together, up and down the most secluded outskirts of the city, hour after hour. And, after a few of these walks in the dark, under the Southern Cross, among the whispering trees in the domain, by the still silent reaches of the river, or beside the rushing surf of the moonlit bay, I began to see a very great and noble soul, trying, through

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the fetters of ignorance and diffidence, to unfold itself before me. In these midnight walks, I heard, bit by bit, clumsily told, yet faithfully, the history of a man who had done good when he had had every temptation to do evil; who had consistently and pertinaciously followed the right, — more, it somehow seemed to me, by some blind instinct, than by any intellectual conviction.

He had recognized my father's great worth at once, and had treated him as an equal and a friend. But with my father he never made any allusion to his origin. He was nearly as jealous of his position with him as he was with Pollifex or Morton. In me the good man seemed to see his own youth reproduced, and he opened his heart to me. I was at that time just what he had been thirty years before, — a young blacksmith apprentice. His confidences with me were little more than soliloquies at first. He had lived in and for himself all his life, and in me he saw the old self of his youth revived. And his great heart, unspoilt after so many fierce struggles with a world which had never had a chance of understanding him, began to unfold itself before the light of my youth and my love.

"Old chap," he said to me one night, among the silent, aromatic trees, "I 've been fighting your battle for you."

"Yes, sir?" I answered.

"Ay. But I have n't altogether won it. I was trying to persuade your father to let you marry at once, whereas I have only beat him down to six months, or, to be correct, to five months and eight days. At the end of that time old fellow, you 're to have your indentures give you, and to marry Martha; which is so far satisfactory, as Pollifex said when he had shot three of the bush-rangers and the kangaroo-hounds had baited the fourth one up in the verandy."

I was in such a flutter of happiness at this most unexpected news, — for we had *hoped* for three years, — that, in trying to say something pretty to him, I found that I was nearly reduced to the old formula of "thank you." I think I decorated it a little; for my kind, good friend, who deserved the title of Honorable if ever a man did, laid his hand on my shoulder, and changed the subject for a time.

"Now, old fellow, it being dark, and Pollifex and Morton not looking out for us (and that is the reason I don't walk with you in the daylight), I 'll just speak to you as one smith may to another. What am I to do about Trevittick?"

"About Trevittick, sir?"

"Ah! about Trevittick. I 've put your father in the way of making his fortune in the trade. He is grateful enough about the matter; for your father is a true gentleman, Jim, mind that, but he is firm on that point."

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I had to explain that I knew nothing.

"Why, I have laid your father on to this job. The township at Port Romilly is just surveyed, and your father is going to set up his forge there. Port Romilly, which lies just under Cape Wilberforce, will be a great place, and your father will make his fortune. Lord bless you, I 'll give six hundred a year for your father in six months. And your father says to me, as firm as a rock, 'If I ever get the chance, Mr. Dawson, I 'll repay your kindness sevenfold; but, with regard to Trevittick, sir, that man stuck to me most noble when the whole world pretty nigh had left me, and I have took Trevittick into partnership; and in partnership he stays, sir, unless by his own act.'"

"But," I said, "my dear sir, I think Trevittick is very honest."

"Confound him, yes; that 's the very worst of it. That 's the very mischief, don't you see. That 's just what makes one long to bang his curly head against that there wall. Two days ago, I laid that man on to a capital thing in the North; but no. Says he to me, as bold as brass, 'Sir, I thank you kindly; but the company of those Burtons has become necessary to me.' That 's just the words he said to me, as cool as you like."

"He 'll make a good partner to my father, sir," I ventured to urge.

"Maybe," said my honorable friend; "but I don't want him down South. Who is that Tom Williams? He seems very thick with him. If I could get that lad away, I expect Trevittick would follow."

"I dare say he would," I said; "but Tom, bless you! would be lost away from us. *He* won't go. My father took him from the parish."

"Eh!" said Mr. Dawson, with new interest.

"From the parish workhouse. Tooting, you know. Had n't got any father and mother, as far as could be ascertained. At least, not worth speaking of. After father got hold of him, he grew six inches and increased one stone six in weight in the first year. Father used to have him put opposite to him, to see him eat his victuals. That boy never had a kind word before he came to us; and since he has come to us, he has never had a cross one. He won't go, sir."

"Ought to be hung if he did," said Mr. Dawson. "A parish boy, eh? I say, old fellow, can you keep a secret?"

"I hope so."

"Why, then, *I'm* a parish boy," he said. "I who stand here, by God's mercy, a rich and honorable gentleman, was brought up in the workhouse of St. Nicholas Without, and, if that ain't the strangest thing ever you heard on, I should be glad to know it."

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After a pause he went on: "We were n't farmed out like you was, — I mean like Tom Williams was, — and they were kind to us in the main. Yes, I think they were kind to me in the main. After forty years, Jim, I don't bear any malice to any one in that workhouse. When I left that house to be bound, I left it with a glad heart; and I turned round and shook my fist at the walls, and was going to curse it, and all the officers in it, save one; but I could n't do it. All of a sudden the thought came over me that it had been my home for fourteen years, hideous and wretched as it was, and I burst out crying. After a year or so, my heart was softened, Jim, and I felt as if I must go back and see the officers, more particularly one I thought had always used me cruel. 'For' I said, 'it's no doubt owing to his beating on me morning, noon, and night, with whatever came handy, that makes me so steady and industrious now.' He used to say there was Scripture for it. And I went back to shake hands with him. And he was dead. And I could n't ask his pardon. And that's been a caution to me about bearing malice ever since."

When I thought of the tender mercies of Tooting, I guessed how much this good man had to forgive, and was silent.

"But the master," he continued, in a brisker tone. "There was a kind man for you. That man never gave me one hard word in fourteen year."

"Could n't he have stopped old Hopkins from beating you, sir?"

"Lord bless you, he never know'd nothing of that. I never was a sneak. I 'd have had my flesh cut to pieces before I 'd have sneaked. And, when I was bound, the master he shook hands with me, and he says, 'You've been a good steady lad, Dawson.' And he gave me a shilling; and I bought a handkercher with it, which I 've got now. And, when I die, Jim Burton, you take and put that handkercher into my coffin; or the money will do you no good."

We parted here, and I went homeward, thinking how it was that this man had not been thrashed into a savage and a criminal, and wondering whether some people were born so good that you could n't spoil them; wondering also whether that calm gentle eye, that quiet face, and that complacent expression of strength in the whole figure, were cause or effect; and while thinking about it I got home, and found that there was company to supper.

Only one. A lady. Mrs. Quickly.

There she was, sitting opposite my mother, exactly the same as ever. As faultlessly clean and neat, with the same exquisite waxen-pale complexion, the same beautifully-parted chestnut hair, scarce sprinkled with gray; the same dark silk gown, fitting so

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perfectly to her neat slim figure; the same beautiful thin hands folded in her lap before her; the same snow-white handkerchief, neatly folded over her bosom; altogether the same ideal of spotless cleanliness and purity; slightly overdone, perhaps, but still beautiful to look on, as of yore; with the very same prurient little devil sitting in the corner of her eye. Mrs. Quickly was there, not changed one bit.

Not even in her cap, which you will notice that I have not as yet mentioned. The fact is that, although Mrs. Quickly was the very pink of prudish neatness in every point, yet still the good woman could not restrain herself in the matter of caps. I have no doubt she would have done it if she could, but the old Adam was too strong in her. She had on a cap like a prize-fighting publican's barmaid, which gave her very much the appearance of having broken out into blossom like an amaryllis, — a plant of more than nun-like quietness of stalk and foliage, surmounted by a gaudy crimson-and-white blossom.

When Mrs. Quickly applied for the post of under-matron to Mrs. Broodhen, at Sydney, that experienced matron gave one look at her cap, and another at her eye, and ordered her out of the room. She forbade her to come near the place, and at last made Sydney too hot to hold her. Mrs. Quickly threatened to go to her lawyer, but did n't. There is no doubt that Mrs. Quickly, as she can prove to you any day, was shamefully used; but then Mrs. Broodhen was a woman of great sagacity and experience, and, as a general rule, knew immensely well what she was about, as many a poor friendless girl will testify with blessings. I traced the calumny of Mrs. Quickly's having been a nobleman's mistress, and of her having been so outrageously extravagant in dress as to half ruin Lord Holloway and oblige him to live abroad, to Tom Williams, and through him to that excellent, though indiscreet, busybody, his present wife, formerly Miss Polly Ager, of this story. Really, even now, I do not know what to say about Mrs. Quickly. I am in a minority, but I can only say that when all was over and done, she made her story good to me. My wife says that she would do so to any man who was fool enough to listen to her.

But still, when I saw that woman sitting there, I felt a cold chill. When I thought of Mrs. Clayton (whilom Mrs. Bill Avery), and Mrs. Quickly living in the same town, I saw that at any moment an explosion might take place, which might bring infinite misery on the head of the innocent Clayton, and others. But then I said to myself that they could not involve us in it, further than as spectators. The Hillyars and the Burtons lived in an atmosphere of their own, an atmosphere of innocent purity, and could not be involved in the troubles of such people as these. Alas!

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"No," I repeated to myself next morning, "the innocent won't suffer for the guilty. My father kept the peace between her and her husband in Brown's Row sometimes, and, if anything leaks out, I hope he 'll be handy to do it again. But we are safe; our course lies smooth and clear before us."

But, when I came round the corner sharp, the very next minute, on our worthy cousin Samuel Burton, sitting on a flour-barrel, under a large umbrella, smoking a Manilla cheroot, in the real Australian way, with the big end in his mouth; then I was not quite so sure that it did.

CHAPTER L.

TREVITTICK'S LATENT MADNESS BEGINS TO APPEAR.

The fierce summer was blazing over head; the forests were parched and crisp; the plains were yellow and dry, and the rivers at their lowest: some barely whispering, others absolutely silent; as we passed away to the southward, towards our new home, and our strange new fortunes.

To the west and north of the town, the dun gray wolds rolled off in melancholy waves towards the great interior; but to the south, on our track, the vast wood-clad mountains, dimly visible in the southwest, had thrown out a spur, which carried the dark forest with it down to the sea, and ended not ten miles from the town in the two noble promontories, Cape Horner and Cape Huskisson; so that we had barely got clear of the enclosures when we found ourselves out of sight of the melancholy plains, travelling along a dusty winding track, fringed on each side with bracken fern, through a majestic open forest of lofty trees.

"I like this better than the plains," said Erne to me. "And yet I believe that I am going to live in the most dreary part of all the plains. The Secretary says that they have to send five miles for firewood."

"Then you have decided what to do, sir?"

"Yes, I was going to tell you as we started, but your natural anxiety about getting on horseback for the first time rendered you rather a bad listener. How do you feel now?"

"Comfortable enough for you to go on; time is getting short."

"Well, I am going to one of the stations belonging to Mr. Charles Morton, for three years, to learn the squatting trade. The Secretary wanted me very much; but I took Morton's offer,

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because this particular station of his lies more in a particular direction than any one of the brother-in-law's; and the Secretary said one station was as good as another, though he was a little offended."

"I suppose it is nearer to us."

"It is *only* sixty miles; but it is nearer than any other."

"What did *she* say this morning?"

"The old word 'never,' Jim. She used the old argument about Joe's deformity, the impossibility of his marrying, and the necessity of some one devoting herself to him. And I said, 'Suppose that obstacle could be removed,' and she said there was a greater one still. She would never consent to drag me down to her level, — that I was made for another sphere of life; and, when I impatiently interrupted her, she said: 'Mr. Hillyar, would Mr. Oxton or Mrs. Morton receive me? And don't you know that you would be cut off from the best society here by marrying me, and have nothing left but the billiard-rooms?' And I hesitated one instant, and she broke out into a little laugh at me. And she let me kiss her hand, and then we separated; and that is the end of all, my old Jim."

"Not forever," I said. "If time or chance could remove those two obstacles ——."

"I am faithful forever," said Erne, in a low voice, "but I am losing hope. If I did not know she loved me, I could bear it better ——."

I knew what was coming, from experience, — a furious tirade against ranks and proprieties; but he was interrupted, for a horse came brushing rapidly along through the short fern, and rattling amongst the fallen bark, which lay about like vast sticks of cinnamon, and up came the Hon. Charles Morton at a slinging trot, on a big chestnut, with a blazed face, and four white stockings, a "Romeo." His shining butcher's boots fitted like a glove, or like Custance's; his spurs were fresh from the plate-brush; his fawn-colored breeches fitted to perfection; his shirt was as white as the Secretary's, and his light drab riding coat (he wore no waistcoat) was met by a bright blue scarf, with a diamond pin, and his Indian pith helmet was wound round with a white veil; his whiskers and mustache were carefully trimmed; and altogether he was one of the most perfect dandies ever seen. This was Charles Morton of the towns; Charles Morton of the bush — the pioneer — was a very different object.

"Hallo, Hillyar, my boy. Well, blacksmith, how are you today? Confoundedly hot in these forests, is it not? Hillyar and I shall be out on the breezy plains in an hour; you will have forest for sixty miles or thereabouts."

I touched my hat for the information.

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"You'll soon leave off doing that," he said, looking at me, laughing. And I thought if I never touched my hat to a less gallant-looking gentleman I should n't care.

"I am sorry to advise you to come up country so soon," said Mr. Morton to Erne. "But as my principal overseer in those parts is going back, it will be a great opportunity for you. He will introduce you to station after station on the road. He is not a gentleman by birth, but he is always received as one. I wish I could introduce you in those parts myself; but, considering your close connexion with the Secretary, he will do as well. Clayton will prove your identity."

When I heard the name "Clayton," I gave a violent start, and cried out, "Good gracious," which made my horse move forward a little faster, and which, consequently, nearly laid me on my back in the road. I lost both my stirrups, and hauled myself upright again by the reins. But my horse did n't care a bit. He only thought I was drunk. He was an aged stockhorse, which I had bought very cheap, as being a secure animal to begin with. He had been many years on the road, and had carried many stockriders out of Palmerston, but never, hitherto, a sober one. He had been very much surprised at my not setting off full gallop for the first mile or two, yelling like a Bedlamite; and had shown that he expected that to happen on two or three occasions, to my infinite horror. He had long since come to the conclusion that I was too far gone in liquor to gallop; and, after my last reel, he concluded that I should soon fall off, and go to sleep in the road for an hour or two, after the manner of stockmen returning from town; in which case he would have a quiet graze until I got sober. He was so fully persuaded of this that I had (with infinite caution, as though I was letting off a large and dangerous firework) to give him, now and then, a gentle reminder with the spur to make him keep up with the others.

"Hallo! blacksmith!" said Mr. Morton. "We must teach you to ride better than that before we have done with you. But, Hillyar, you will find Clayton a very good, honest fellow. His wife is a woman of low origin, but well-behaved, who sings ballads, if you care about that; there are no children, which, perhaps, you will be glad of. You will, however, find some books there. I am sorry to put you in a house where there is no society of your own rank; but it was your choice, remember. As soon as you feel able to undertake the thing, I will put you in charge of one of the other stations thereabout, and then you will have a table and cellar of your own. It is time to say good-bye to your friend now; here is Wattle Creek, and we take the road to the right; I will ride on; you will soon pick me up. Good-bye, blacksmith. God speed you heartily, my boy."

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So, in his delicacy, he rode on, and left Erne and me alone together. There were many last words; and then the last of all — "Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my dear old Jim. Keep her in mind of me. Good-bye."

And so he rode slowly away, and I saw him through a mist. When my eyes cleared again, I saw him passing on from sunlight to shade, from shade to sunlight again, through an aisle in the dim forest cathedral, whose pillars were trunks of the box-trees, and whose roof was their whispering foliage. Further and further yet, until he was lost among the thickening stems and denser boskage of some rising ground beyond. And then I sat upon my grazing horse, alone in this strange forest, foolishly wondering if I should see him, or any one I had ever known, again; for all the past seemed more like reality than the present.

But I have noticed as a curious fact that town-bred blacksmith boys, however affectionate, are not given to sentiment; and, the moment Erne was out of sight, and I had dried, — blown my nose, — I began to make such a series of remarkable discoveries that Erne, and the awful fact of his going to live in the house with Mrs. Clayton, sometime Avery, *née* Martin, went clean out of my mind. I gave myself up to the wild delight of being for the first time in a new and strange land.

Conceive my awe and delight at finding that the whole place was swarming with parrots. Hundreds of little green ones, with short tails, who were amazingly industrious and busy, and who talked cheerily to one another all the time; others still more beautiful, with long tails (shell parrots, we call them, but now so popular in London as Zebra parakeets), who, crowded in long rows, kissed one another, and wheetled idiotically; larger and more glorious ones yet, — green, orange, scarlet, and blue (mountain blues), — who came driving swiftly through the forest in flocks, whistling and screaming; and, lastly, gentle lories, more beautiful in color than any, who sat on the Banksias like a crop of crimson and purple flowers.

Then I made another discovery. I crossed the creek, and, blundering up the other bank, struck my spurs deep into the old horse's sides, and away he went full gallop, and I did not fall off. As soon as I recovered my presence of mind, by using certain directions given me by Erne and others, I made the wonderful discovery that I could stick on, and that I rather liked it. I was in a colonial-made saddle, with great pads in front of the knee, and I found that by keeping my toes slightly in, and raising my heels, I could sit as easily as in a rocking-chair. I assisted myself with the pom — our space is limited — but I was most perfectly at home after a mile, and found it the most delightful thing

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I had ever experienced, to go charging on ten miles an hour through a primeval forest towards unknown surprises and unknown dangers.

Whether the old horse thought that my intoxication had, like some recorded cases of hydrophobia, broken out after a long period of incubation, or whether he thought that I was the victim of an acute attack of skyblues (as he would have called the malady known to the faculty as delirium tremens, could he have spoken), I am unable to say; but he went like the wind.

The road turned and wound about very much among the tree stems, but the old horse took care of me. I was prepared for any adventure or surprise, from a lion downwards, when I was startled by the shrill cry of familiar voices, and, pulling up, found myself in the bosom of my family.

There were the dear old Chelsea group, a little older, sitting by themselves in this strange forest, just as they used to sit in old times in the great old room at home, — my father and mother on a box, side by side, Emma and Martha on the ground, with the children grouped round them, and Joe leaning against a tree, musing, just as he used to lean against the mantel-piece in old times.

"And poor Reuben," I thought, "where was he?" But I said nothing. I asked my father how he found himself, and my father replied, "Bustin'"; and really the dear old fellow did look most remarkably radiant, as did the others, save Joe and Emma.

"We 've been a having such a game a coming along, old man," said my father. "We seen a alligator as hooked it up a tree; did n't us, Fred?"

"And Harry, he 's a drawed it in his book beautiful," said my mother complacently. "And now he 's a drawing his own Jim a horseback, full gallop, as we see you a coming along just now. And Frank has been talking beautiful, and ——"

I had dismounted, and Tom Williams had kindly taken my horse for me, and I was looking over my mother's shoulder at Harry's drawing of the great Monitor lizard and my humble self, rather uncertain, I confess, which was the lizard and which was me; but my mother had succeeded in getting my head against hers, and I asked in a whisper, "How are they?"

"Joe 's terrible low," said my mother; "lower than ever I saw him. But Emma 's keeping up noble. Did he send her any message?"

"No. How could he? He has got his final answer."

"I wish he had sent some message or other to her," said my mother; "for her heart 's a breaking for him, and a few words would have been so precious. Could n't you, eh, Jim, — did n't he say anything?"

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I did not wait for my dear mother to propose point blank that we should coin a message together, but I went over and sat beside Emma, and took Fred on my lap.

"He is gone," I said in a low voice.

There was only a catch in her breath. She made no answer.

"Shall I tell you his last words?"

The poor girl only nodded her head.

"He said, 'Good-bye, Jim. Don't let her forget me.' And no more I will."

There was the slightest possible suspicion of scorn in the look she gave me as she said, "Is that very likely?"

Perhaps I was nettled; perhaps it was only owing to my clumsy eagerness about the matter which lay nearest to my heart. I cannot decide which it was, but I said,—

"Would you not recall him now if you could?"

She did not answer in words, but she turned and looked at me; and, when she had caught my eye, she carried it with hers, until they rested on the figure of poor Joe, who had sat down on a log, with his great head buried in his hands. I understood her, and said no more, but quietly drew her to me and kissed her.

"If those two obstacles could be removed," I found myself saying a dozen times that day, and for many days.

We were travelling with a caravan of bullock drays, seven in number, each drawn by eight bullocks, all the property of our friend the Hon. Mr. Dawson, which were returning empty to one of his many stations, Karra Karra, after taking to Palmerston a trifle of fourteen tons of fine merino wool, to swell his gigantic wealth. It was a very pleasant, lazy way of travelling, and I think that, when the long 270 miles of it came to an end, there was not one of us who did not wish that we could have gone a few miles further.

If the road was smooth, you could sit on the dray. If it was rough, you could walk, and walk faster than the dray went; so much faster that some of us would walk forward along the track, which still wandered through dense and magnificent forest, as much as a mile or two, into the unknown land before us; and, forewarned of snakes, gather such flowers as we could find, which at this time of year were not many. We had very few adventures. Sometimes we would meet a solitary horseman; sometimes a flock of two or three thousand sheep going to market, whose three shepherds rode on horseback, and whose dogs, beautiful Scotch sheep-dogs, alert and watchful, but gasping with thirst, would find a moment to come to Fred or Harry and rub themselves against them complacently, and tell them how hot, hot, hot, it was. Sometimes again would come a great drove of

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fat cattle, guided by three or four wild-looking stockmen, in breeches and boots, which in this hot weather were the principal part of their clothing, for they had nothing else but shirts without any buttons, and hats generally without any ribbons. These men were accompanied by horrid great dogs, who cut Fred and Harry dead; but in spite of their incivility, their masters were very good-humored and kind, keeping their cattle away from us with their terrible great stockwhips. The head stockman would always stay behind and talk to us, — sometimes for a long while, — generally asking us questions about England, — questions which seemed almost trivial to us. I remember that one wild handsome fellow, who told Emma in pure chivalrous admiration, that looking at her was as good as gathering cowslips; was very anxious, when he heard we were from Chelsea, to find out if we had ever met his mother, whose name was Brown, and who lived at Putney. He was afraid something was wrong with the old lady, he said, for he had n't heard from her this ten years, and then she was seventy-five. He would go home some of these days, he added, and knock the old girl up.

After a few of these expeditions, ahead of the drays, we began to take Trevittick the sulky with us. For Trevittick, thirsting madly after knowledge, in the manner of his blue-haired fellow-Phœnicians, had spent more than he could very well afford in buying a book on the colonial flora. He now began to identify the flowers as fast as we got them; and, as the whole of us went at the novel amusement with a will, and talked immensely about it afterwards, we attracted poor Joe's attention, and, to my great delight, he began to join us, and to enter somewhat into the pleasure with us.

The forest continued nearly level; the only irregularities were the banks of the creeks which we crossed at intervals of about ten miles, — chains of still ponds walled by dark shrubs, shut in on all sides by the hot forest, so that no breath of air troubled their gleaming surface. But, when a hundred miles were gone, the land began to rise and roll into sharp ascents and descents; and one forenoon we came to a steep and dangerous hill. And, while we were going cautiously down through the thick hanging trees, we heard the voice of a great river rushing through the wood below us. As we struggled through it, with the cattle belly-deep in the turbid green water, we had a glimpse right and left of a glorious glen, high piled with gray rocks, with trees hanging in every cranny and crag, and solemn pines which shot their slender shafts aloft, in confused interlacing groups, beautiful beyond expression. Only for a minute did we see this divine glen; instantly after, we were struggling up the opposite cliff, in the darksome forest once more.

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"Why," I asked one of the bullock drivers, who volunteered that evening to show me a place to bathe, "why is the water so ghastly cold? I can scarcely swim."

"Snow, mate, snow. This water was brought down from Mount Poniatowski by yesterday's sun."

The next morning the scene changed strangely, and Trevittick walked like one in a dream. As we went up a hill we saw the light between the tree stems at the top, and the wind began to come more freshly to our cheeks. When we reached the summit the forest had come to an end, and we were looking over into Flinders Land.

A glorious country indeed; sheets of high rolling down, and vast stretches of table-land, bounded by belts of forest, and cut into by deep glens everywhere, — channels for the snow-water from the mountains. Two great lakes gleamed among dark woodlands at different elevations, and far to the left was a glimpse of distant sea. A fair, beautiful, smiling land, and yet one of the most awful the eye ever rested on: for there was one feature in it which absorbed all the others, and made waving wood, gleaming lake, and flashing torrent but secondary objects for the eye to rest on, — just as the ribbed cliffs of stone which form the nave of Winchester, make the chantries of Wykeham and Edyngton appear like children's toys.

Far to the right, towering horrible and dark, rose, thousands of feet in the air, high above everything, a scarped rampart of dolomite, as level as a wall; of a lurid gray color with deep brown shadows. It dominated the lower country so entirely that the snow mountains beyond were invisible for it, and nothing gave notice of their presence but a lighter gleam in the air, above the dark wall. It stretched away, this wall, into the furthest distance the eye could penetrate. It had bays in it, and sometimes horrid rents, which seemed to lead up into the heart of the mountains, — rents steep and abrupt, ending soon and suddenly, — glens bounded with steep lawns of gleaming green. Sometimes it bent its level outline down, and then from the lowest point of the dip streamed eternally a silver waterfall, which, snow-fed, waxed and waned as the sun rose or fell. But there hung the great rock wall, frowning over the lovely country below; like Pitt's face at the last; reflecting in some sort of way smiles of sunshine and frowns of cloud, yet bearing the ghastly look of Austerlitz through it all.

So for twelve days this dark rampart haunted us, and led our eyes to it at all times, never allowing us to forget its presence. In the still cool night it was black, in the morning it was purple, at noon it was heavy pearly gray, and at sunset gleaming copper-color. Sometimes, when we were down in a deep glen, or cross-

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me rushing river, we could only catch a glimpse of the ll cutting the bright blue sky; sometimes, again, when aloft on a breezy down, the whole of the great ram- would be in sight at once, stretching north and south as far he eye could reach; but for twelve days it bent its ghastly rown upon us, until we grew tired of it, and wished it would end.

At last it ended. Gradually, for three days, a peaked mountain grew upon our sight, until we reached it, and began passing over the smooth short turf which formed its glacis; a mountain which rose out of the lower land in advance of, and separate from, the great wall which I have been describing; a mountain which heaved a smooth sharp cone aloft out of the beautiful slate country through which we had been travelling, and whose apex pierced the heavens with one solitary needle-like crag. It was the last remnant of the walls of the old lava crater, of a volcano which had been in action long after the great cliff, which we had watched so long, had been scorched and ruined into its present form. The men called the peak Nicnicabarlah; and, when we had rounded the shoulder of it, we saw that our journey's end was near; for a beautiful fantastic mountain range hurled itself abruptly into the sea across our path, and barred our further progress, and as soon as we sighted it the men called out at once, "There you are, mates; there is Cape Wilberforce!"

"Cape Trap," growled Trevittick. "I'm blowed if I ever see such a game as this here. There should be *something* or another hereabout. — Tom Williams, don't be a fool, showing off with that horse. He ain't your 'n, and you can't ride him; so don't rattle his legs to bits."

Trevittick was always surly when he was excited, and, to lead away his temper from Tom, I began asking questions of the men.

"Where is the town of Romilly?"

"Down to the left, between the timber and the plain, alongside of the Erskine river; the little river Brougham joins it just above the town. The Brougham rises in the mountains, and comes down through Barker's Gap. This is Barker's Gap we are passing now, the valley between Nicnicabarlah and the Cape Wilberforce mountain. There was a great fight with bush-rangers hereabouts a year or two back, when young Inspector Hillyar finished three on 'em single-handed. He was a sulky, ill-conditioned beast, but a good-plucked 'un. He married Miss Neville; he used to come courting after her to Barker's. That 's Barker's down yonder."

He pointed to a cluster of gray roofs in a break in the forest down below, and very soon after our whole caravan began to

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descend one of the steep, rocky gullies which led from the shoulder of the volcano towards the sea, and very shortly came into beautiful open forest-country, with a light sandy soil, the grass thin, but not wanting in abundance, and the ground intersected by innumerable dry watercourses.

There was a new mountain just in this place which attracted our notice, — a little mountain, but wonderfully abrupt and picturesque, with high castellated crags. It was such a very lovely little mountain that Trevittick, Tom Williams, Joe, and I, started off to go a little way up it.

A beautiful little mountain; tumbled boulders round the base, and steep escarpments of gray stone above, feathered with those trees which the colonists call cherries, but which we will in future call cypresses, for the sake of English readers.* Trevittick got on the hill first, and, having taken up a bit of rock, said, "Well, I'm blowed," and seemed inclined to hurl it at Tom Williams, who was helping Joe to hunt a grasshopper about four inches long. To save an explosion I went up to him, and he unburdened his heart to me.

"Why," he said, "*it's granite.*"

I said I was very glad to hear it, but he turned on me so sharply that I was almost afraid I had made a mistake, and that I ought to have said that I had dreaded as much from the first. But after a somewhat contemptuous glance at me, he went on, —

"Yes, it's granite, or the substitute for it used in these 'ere parts. But it ain't felspathic-looking enough to suit *my* stomach, so I don't deceive you nor no other man. Tom Williams, why be you hunting locusts instead of noticing how the granite has boiled up over the clay slates? Perhaps you'd like to see a plague of 'em; though, for that matter, nine out of the ten plagues all at once would n't astonish the cheek out of a Cockney, and the effect of the plague of darkness would be only temporary, and even that would n't only make them talk the faster."

Trevittick's ill-humor showed me that he was excited, although I did not in the least know why, or really care. I am afraid that at times I thought Trevittick, with all his knowledge, little better than a queer-tempered oddity. Perhaps what confirmed me in this belief, just at this time, was his way of expounding the Scriptures, which he did every Sunday morning, as I honestly confess, to my extreme annoyance. The moment that man got on the subject of religion, all his shrewdness and his cleverness seemed to desert him, and he would pour forth, for a whole hour, in a sing-song voice, a mass of ill-considered platitudes on the most solemn subjects; in the which every sentence, almost

* Exocarpus cupressiformis.

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every word, was twisted round to meet the half-dozen dogmas which formed his creed. After his exposition of the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah, Joe and I declined further attendance.

A pleasant road, winding for miles among gently inclined forest gullies, led us to our new home, and, while the sun was still alive in the topmost branches of the majestic trees, we came upon the inn where we were to stay for the present. There were this one inn and a few other huts and inclosed paddocks scattered in the half-cleared forest around, but the sounds of nature, gentle and subdued as they were upon this quiet evening, far overpowered the faint noises of human occupancy. When the drays had gone on and left us, and the cracking of the last whip had died away in the wood, and the last dog had done barking from some little shanty far among the trees; then the air was filled with the whistling of birds, and the gentle rush of the evening breeze among the topmost boughs; for the little river Brougham, which falls into the larger Erskine here, had ceased to babble in the drought, — was sleeping till the summer should end.

CHAPTER LI.

CHANGES IN THE ROMILLY HOME.

VERY quiet was Romilly in those old days, — so old, yet in reality so recent. Ah me, what a turn my world has taken since I stood in the dusty road that evening, with Emma leaning on my arm and saying, —

"What a happy place, Jim. What a peaceful place. See there, there is the burial-ground through the trees. I would sooner be buried there than at Chelsea, — but — it don't much matter where, does it? What was it Joe was reading to us out of the new book? Something, — and there came

> 'And hands so often clasped with mine
> Should toss with tangle and with shells.'

I cannot remember any more, but it was about hearing the feet of those who loved you pass over your grave."

My father and mother were two people who carried home about with them. Those two people, sitting together, would have made it home, even on an iceberg. Their inner life was so perfectly, placidly good; the flame of their lives burnt so clearly and so steadily that its soft light was reflected on the faces of all those

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who came within its influence; and such virtues as there were among those who were familiar with them were brought into strong relief, while their vices retired into deep shadow. In a few words, they were good people, and, like all good people, to some extent made others good. Not only did we of the family fall into our quiet grooves at once, but this township of Romilly began to rally round my father and mother before we had been established a week. Began to call at all hours and waste our time, to borrow and lend pots and kettles; to give, to ask, but seldom or never to follow advice; to go on, in fact, much the same as the Chelsea people had done, on the other side of the water. After the first week of the establishment of our new shop, the men came and leant in at the window, and sat on the anvil, and toyed with the hammers, just in the old style; and, before my mother had been a week in the hastily-erected slab-house, the women began to come in, to flump down into a seat, and to tell her all about it. People in some ranks of life would be surprised at the facility with which the lower classes recognize thoroughly trustworthy and good people. My father and mother not only submitted to these levees, but felt flattered by them. Every woman in the township had declined to know much of Mrs. Podder, — who was known to have travelled for her sins, — until they "met" her at Mrs. Burton's, standing against the fire-place, with her bare arms folded on her bosom, smoking a short black pipe. Mrs. Burton had "took her up," and that was enough. Mrs. Burton was so big, so gentle, and so good, that even the little weasel-faced Mrs. Rance, with the vinegar temper, had nothing more to say. Again, my father made no difference between Jim Reilly and the best of them. Jim Reilly was free to come and go, and get a kind word at the forge; and the forge was neutral ground, and Jim was undeniably good company; and so Jim was spoken to at the forge, and if you spoke to him at the forge you could not cut him elsewhere. And so it came about that Jim found himself in respectable company again, and mended his ways (which wanted mending sadly), for very shame's sake. And in time the stories about Jim's "horse-planting" propensities got forgotten, and Jim rode his own horses only, and grew respectable.

So time began to run smoothly on once more, and a month began to slip by more rapidly than a week had used to do in more unquiet seasons. The week was spent in those happy alternations of labor and rest which are only known to the prosperous mechanic, — alternate periods of labor, in which the intellect is half-deadened, because instinctive manual dexterity has, through long practice, rendered thought unnecessary, and of rest, when that intellect begins to unfold itself like some polypus, or sea anemone, and cast its greedy arms abroad in all directions to

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seize and tuck headlong into its unsatisfied stomach everything not actually inorganic. "Oh dura messorum ilia!" Oh delicious unsatisfied hunger! Oh blessed intellectual digestion! Did you ever read "Zimmerman on Solitude" and somebody's (goodness knows who's now) "History of the United States" through in one week? I did. And Jim Williams lay in the bed opposite, maddened and sulky with the few scraps I threw him about Saratoga and the *Macedonian*, Bunker's Hill and the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake*.

Joe got horribly angry with Tom Williams and me on the subject of discursive reading. He (in the heat of the moment, I hope,) said one day that he should like to see me wrecked on a desert island, with a year's provisions, and nothing to read but Gibbon and Mosheim. That, he said, was the only thing which could happen to me that would make a man of me. After dexterously recalling a few compliments he had paid to Mosheim a week past that very day, in answer, I begged to be allowed his favorite copy of Rabelais. But he said that Rabelais would rise from his grave if he attempted any such profane act.

"Jim," he went on, "I am only chaffing; you are a better scholar than I am. You know men, and I only know works. Now see how much in earnest I am; I am come to you to ask you to decide a most important affair for me, and I bind myself in honor to abide by your decision. Tom Williams, old fellow, would you mind leaving Jim and me alone a little? I know you won't be offended, Tom."

Tom departed, smiling, and then I said, "Martha, my love, perhaps you had better go and help Emma"; but Joe rose in his stately way, and, having taken her hand, kissed it, and led her to her seat again. The blacksmith's hunchbacked son had gradually refined and developed himself into a very good imitation of a high-bred gentleman; and his courtesy somehow reflected itself on the pretty ex-maid-of-all-work, for she merely smiled a pleasant natural smile on him, and sat down again. What could a duchess have done more? But then courtesy comes so naturally to a woman.

"I cannot go on with the business in hand, my sweet sister," continued Joe, "unless you stay here to protect me. You know my brother's temper; unless I had your sweet face between me and his anger, I should not dare to announce a resolution I have taken."

"Pray," I said, "keep alive the great family fiction, — that, because I splutter and make a little noise when I am vexed, therefore I have a worse temper than others; pray, don't let that fiction die. I should be sorry if it did, for I reap great advantage from it; I always get my own way, — if, indeed, that is any

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advantage. However, go on, Joe; if your resolution was not an infinitely foolish one, we should not have had all these words of preparation."

"Why," said Joe, "that is hardly the state of the case. In the first place, you are not going to have your own way this time, because I am going to have mine; and, my will being stronger than yours, you will have the goodness to go to the wall with as little noise as possible. In the next place, my resolution is not an infinitely foolish one, but an infinitely wise one. The only question about it is, Shall I be able to argue your fool's head into a sufficient state of clearness to see the wisdom of it?"

Whenever Joe and I came to what I vulgarly called "hammer and tongs," I always yielded. I yielded now with perfect good humor, I think, and laughed; though Joe was really ruffled for a minute.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "that I have an offer of a place as second-master in the Government School in Palmerston; and I have accepted it. In three years I shall be inspector."*

I was really delighted at the news. I had seen a long time that Joe had been getting very discontented and impatient in consequence of the commonplace life which we were forced to lead. He was "chafing under inaction" (a phrase which expresses nothing save in its second intention, but is good enough, nevertheless). I was pleased with his news, but I was very much puzzled at the hesitation with which he communicated it.

I said, "Joe, I am sincerely glad to hear what you tell me. We shall miss you, my dear old fellow, but you will never be happy here. There is no doubt that if you once get the thin edge of the wedge in you will make a career for yourself. And, as far as I can see, you will have a good chance of getting the thin edge of the wedge in now. I don't like to tell you how glad I *am*, for fear you should think that I shall bear our separation too lightly; but I am very glad, and so I don't deceive you."

"So you should be, my faithful old brother. I should soon become a plague to you here. But have you no other remark to make about this resolution?"

"No. In *particular*, no. In a general way of speaking, I am glad of it. With regard to details, — now, have you broke it to father?"

"No," said Joe, plumply; "*you* must do that."

I did n't see any great difficulty about that. I was beginning to say that he would require a regular fit-out of new clothes, and that we could manage that nicely now, when who, of all people in the world, should put in her oar but Martha.

* The educational arrangements in Cooksland are different from those in any the other colonies.

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"I suppose you have told Emma," she said.

"There!" said Joe. "A woman against the world. That is the very point I have been driving at, and have been afraid to broach."

"Do you want me to break it to her?" I asked.

"Break it to her! Why, my dear brother, it is all her doing from beginning to end. She gave me the first intimation that the offer would be made me, and then quietly told that she had been in communication with Miss Burke about it for some months. She began on Miss Burke. I honestly confess that *I* should never have thought of debauching the leader of the Opposition before I put in my claim to Ministers, but *she* did. She began on Miss Burke for the mere sake of inducing her to keep the Irish party quiet about my appointment; in the which phase of her proceedings Miss Burke's love for Lady Hillyar was her trump card, with which card she seems to have taken several tricks. Meanwhile, only three weeks ago, finding that Miss Burke was staying down here at the Barkers, she contrived an interview with her; and not only did she completely stop any opposition on the part of Mr. O'Ryan, but she actually persuaded, induced, bamboozled, — I know not what word to use, — Miss Burke into making the matter in some sort a party question. As I stand here, Miss Burke has made Mr. O'Ryan go to Mr. Oxton and say that, in case of my appointment to the inspectorship, not a word, on their sacred word of honor, either next session or any future session, should pass the lips of any son of Erin on the subject of the appointment of Billy Morton to the harbor-mastership. And that 's your Emma!"

I thought it was my Lesbia Burke, too, but I did n't say so. And, indeed, I was too much engaged in wondering at what Joe told me about Emma to think much about Lesbia Burke just now. I confess that I was a little amazed at this last exhibition of cunning and courage in Emma. If I had not repelled her by a little coarseness of speech and a little roughness of temper, she would have confided in me more, and I should have noticed the sudden development of character which took place in her after our troubles, — that sudden passage from girlhood into womanhood. But, indeed, it was only fault of manner on my part. And she loved me: she loved me better than all of them put together. Indeed she did.

"How do you want me to act in the matter, then?" I said.

"I want you to undertake father and mother. I want you not only to tell them of my appointment, but also to tell them this, — that Emma has determined, under their approval, of course, to come to Palmerston, and keep house for me."

I started as he said this. I was unprepared for it; and, as I

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did so, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and, turning round, I saw that Emma was standing behind me.

"Emma," I said, "are you really going to leave us?"

She motioned me to come out with her, and we went out together and walked among the trees.

"You are not going to dissuade me from going, are you, my brother?" she said.

I was quite silent. She clasped her two hands together over my arm, and hurriedly asked me if I was angry.

"There is never any confidence given to me until all the world knows the matter," I said; "then, when it is impossible to alter matters, the affair is broken to me. Can you wonder that I am ruffled sometimes? I will not be angry now, but I will not allow that I have no reason."

"Only because I did not confide in you; not because you disapprove of our resolution?"

"Well, yes. I approve on the whole of your resolution; it is natural that you should be by his side for the present; though the time will soon come when he will not want you. You will be hardly ornamental enough to sit at a statesman's table, my poor, fat old thing."

Poor Emma was so glad to hear me speak in my natural tone that she threw her arms round my neck. I laughed and said, —

"There is some one who don't think you a fat old thing, ain't there? When will you go?"

"Next week."

"So soon? Does Joe say it is necessary?"

"No," she answered with some decision; "he does not say it is necessary. But I urged him to go, and pointed out the reason, and he quite approves of my resolution."

"Erne will think it very unkind. It will be so marked, to go only a day or two before his first visit."

"Let him think it unkind. I know which is the kindest line of action. I shall go, Jim. This is a matter in which I must decide for myself. Why did you start? Have you seen anything?"

We had wandered away along a track in the forest till we had nearly come to a dense clump of the low tree called lightwood (sufficiently like an English bay tree), through which the road passed. The night was gathering fast, and, when we were within fifty yards of the dark place, my cousin Samuel emerged from the gloom and came towards us.

I walked straight on, with Emma on my arm, intending to pass him without speaking. I had never spoken to him in Palmerston, and she had never seen him there; so this was her

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first meeting with him since that dreadful night when she had rescued Reuben from that den of thieves into which he had drawn him. I was made anxious and angry by his sudden appearance here in Romilly, and I very much wished to avoid having anything to do with him.

Emma, however, would not pass him without a kind word, and so she stopped as he stood aside to let us pass him, and said, —

"It is a long while since we met, cousin. I hope you have been well since I saw you."

"I have been very well," he answered, with a false smile wreathing on his thin lips. "I am very much obliged to you for speaking to me, for I was anxious to see you, and ask you a question."

"I shall be glad to answer it," she replied. "I am your debtor, you know."

"You are pleased to say so. I will go on, with your leave. I am exceedingly anxious and unhappy about my boy Reuben."

"On what grounds?" said Emma. "He is well, and is doing very well. I heard from him last mail."

"He preserves a dead silence towards me. I never hear a word from him. I have no answer to my letters. What is the meaning of this?"

By this time his voice had risen to a shrill treble, and he was waving his arm up and down threateningly; his pinched features, his long nose, and his high sloping eyebrows began to form an *ensemble* which looked uncommonly vicious. He went on, —

"He has been tampered with, his affections have been alienated from me, and his mind has been poisoned against me, by that scoundrel. How dares he? Is he mad?"

I said that none of us had ever been so wicked as to stand between Reuben and his father.

"I am not talking of you, my lad," he said in a quieter voice. "You and yours have always been what is kind and good. I am speaking of a scoundrel, a wretch, without decency, without gratitude, — a monstrous mass of utter selfishness. But let him take care! Let him take care!"

And so he walked swiftly away under the darkening shadows, with his hand raised menacing over his head, muttering, "Let him take care." And it came into my head that if I were the gentleman referred to I most certainly would take uncommon good care.

"It's Morton, the keeper, he is so wild against," I remarked. "I am glad that there is fourteen or fifteen thousand miles between them."

"It must be Morton," said Emma; "otherwise I might think

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it was Sir George. What a strange thing this is, his never coming near Stanlake! I wonder why?"

"I cannot think," I said, as we turned homewards, "that Reuben is right in not writing to his father. I cannot understand it; it is unlike Reuben."

"I do not understand it either," said Emma. "I will certainly mention it to him the next time I write. Poor old Reuben! how I should like to see him again! How time goes on, don't it, eh? Jim, I want to walk farther with you in the dark, just one more turn."

"Come," I said, cheerfully. "I could walk forever in this delicious owl's-light, with you beside me."

"I went on with her gently, whistling and waiting for her to begin. I was very anxious.

"I am going to ask a half a dozen questions about Mr. Erne Hillyar. Is he ever likely to be rich?"

"I cannot see how. He gets some nominal salary where he is, — two hundred a-year, I think; and, when he is out of his apprenticeship, I do not see how he is to start on his own account without capital. His share of the property would certainly be enough to make him rich here. But, as I tell you, he will die sooner than claim it."

"A strange crotchet. But look here. He would take it in an instant if a reconciliation were brought about between him and his brother. Why could not that be done? Think of it."

"What is the good? Erne here in Australia, and Sir George at Timbuctoo by this time, for aught we know! Nonsense. There are only two obstacles to prevent your accepting Erne, as you well know, — the care of Joe, and your dread of lowering Erne. About the first obstacle I shall say nothing, but I certainly don't want Erne to be raised away above our level once more, and so I tell you plainly."

We said no more, but went silently in. I kissed her when we came to the door. Those sweet sister-kisses were becoming precious now, for was she not going to Palmerston to keep house for Joe? and one might not see her again for so long, — certainly not till after I was married. There was between us one deep source of disagreement. I had set my heart on her marrying Erne, and she would have none of it. But still she was very, very dear to me, — dearer perhaps and more valued since that cause of disagreement had arisen between us than she had ever been before.

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CHAPTER LII.

FEEDS THE BOAR AT THE OLD FRANK?

THE pleasant summer passed away, and Gerty found to her terror that the days when she dared creep out into the sun with Baby, and warm herself under the south wall, were become fewer; that the cruel English winter was settling down once more, and that she and her little one would have to pass it together in the great house alone.

At first, after George's departure, people continued to call; but Gerty never returned their visits, and before the later nights of September began to grow warningly chill, it was understood that Sir George was abroad; and very soon afterwards Lady Tattle found out that Lady Hillyar was mad, my dear, and that Sir George had refused to let her go into an asylum, but had generously given up Stanlake to her and her keeper. That florid gray-headed man whom we saw driving with her in Croydon was the keeper. Such stories did they make about poor Gerty and Mr. Compton; which stories, combined with Gerty's shyness, ended in her being left entirely alone before autumn was well begun.

Soon after Sir George's departure Mr. Compton heard from him on business, and a very quiet business-like letter he wrote. He might be a very long time absent, he said, and therefore wished these arrangements to be made. The most valuable of the bricabrac was to be moved from Grosvenor-place to Stanlake; Lady Hillyar would select what was to be brought away, and then the house was to be let furnished. The shooting on the Wiltshire and Somersetshire estates was to be let if possible. The shooting at Stanlake was not to be let, but Morton was to sell all the game which was not required for the house by Lady Hillyar. Mr. Compton would also take what game he liked. He wished the rabbits killed down: Farmer Stubble, at Whitespring, had been complaining. The repairs requested by Farmer Stubble were to be done at once, to the full extent demanded; and so on in other instances, — yielding quietly, and to the full, points he had been fighting for for months. At last he came to Stanlake. Stanlake was to be kept up exactly in the usual style. Not a servant discharged. Such horses as Lady Hillyar did not require were to be turned out, but none sold, and none bought, except under her ladyship's directions. He had written

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to Drummonds, and Lady Hillyar's cheques could be honored. There was a revolution here, (Paris,) but how the dickens it came about, he, although on the spot, could n't make out. There were no buttons here such as Lady Hillyar wished for; but, when he got to Vienna, he might get some, and would write to her from that place, and put her in possession of facts. She might, however, rely that, if money could get them, she should have them.

He did not write one word to Gerty. His old habits were coming back fast, — among others, that of laziness. Boswell, enlarging on a hastily expressed opinion of Johnson's, tries to make out the ghastly doctrine that all men's evil habits return to them in later life. What Boswell says is, possibly, no matter, — although he was not half such a fool as it has pleased my Lord Macaulay to make him out; yet there is a horrible spice of truth in this theory of his, which makes it noticeable. Whether Boswell was right or not in general, he would have been right in particular if he had spoken of Sir George Hillyar; for, from the moment he cut the last little rope which bound him to his higher life, his old habits began flocking back to him like a crowd of black pigeons.

The buttons came from Vienna, and a letter. The letter was such a kind one that she went singing about the house for several days, and Mr. Compton, coming down to see her, was delighted and surprised at the change in her. After Sir George's departure, the poor little woman had one of her periodical attacks of tears, which lasted so long that she got quite silly, and Mr. Compton and the housekeeper had been afraid of her going mad. But she had no return of tearfulness after the letter from Vienna, but set cheerfully to work to garrison her fortress against the winter.

She would have had a few trees cut down for firewood in the Australian manner, had not the steward pointed out to her ladyship the inutility and extravagance of such a proceeding. She therefore went into coals to an extent which paralyzed the resources of the coal merchant, who waited on her, and with tears in his eyes begged her not to withdraw her order, but to give him time; that was all he asked for, — time. The next thing she did was, by Baby's advice, to lay in a large stock of toys, and then, by her own, an immense number of cheap novels. And, when all this was done, she felt that she could face the winter pretty comfortably.

Stanlake was a great, solemn, gray-white modern house, with a broad flagged space all round, standing in the centre of the park, but apart from any trees: the nearest elm being a good hundred yards away, though the trees closed in at a little dis-

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tance from the house, and hid the landscape. It was a very dreary place even in summer; in winter, still more solemn and desolate. When it had been filled with company there had been noise and bustle enough perhaps, but, now that Gerty was left in solitary state, silence seemed to settle down and brood on it the whole day long. In the morning, when the men were washing the horses, there would be some pleasant sounds from the stable-yard; but, when they had done, — except when a dog barked in the distant kennel, or the rooks made a faint sound in the distant rookery, — perfect stillness seemed to reign over everything.

Within, all was endless gallery opening into library, library into dining-room, dining-room into drawing-room, till the astonished visitor found that he had gone round the house and came back to the hall again. The drawing-rooms were pleasant and light, the library was dark and comfortable, the dining-room was staidly convivial: it was merely a common-place, well-furnished, grand house; but now, since Sir George's departure, since silence had settled down in it, it began to have such a ghastly air about it that the servants generally came into the rooms in pairs, and showed a great tendency to sit together over the fire in the steward's room and servants' hall at night, and not move for trifles.

And the ghost which frightened them all was no other than poor little Gerty. They never knew where they were going to find her. These old staid, gray-headed servants had always thought her ladyship very queer, but now she began to be to them what the Scotch call uncanny. There were, as the housekeeper would have told you with pride, (as if she had built the house,) no less than three hundred feet of suite in the great rooms which ran round the house, and in this suite there were no less than sixteen fireplaces. When the first frost sent the leaves fluttering off the elms, and rattling off the horse-chestnuts, Gerty had every one of these fires lit and carefully attended to all day. It was now that the servants, who had always been slightly afraid of her, began to steal about the rooms: for, among all the sixteen fireplaces, it was impossible to say at which a nervous middle-aged footman would find her ladyship lying on her back on the hearth-rug, and talking unutterable nonsense, either to Baby, or, what was worse, in his unavoidable absence, to herself. The servants, being mostly old, got so many frights by trusting themselves in the great wilderness of furniture, and coming on Lady Hillyar in the very place where they would have betted all they had she was n't, that it became the custom to plead indisposition in order to avoid going, and in some cases to resort to stimulants before going, into the strange ghostly region alone.

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Sometimes they would hear her romping with Baby. Sometimes her voice would come from afar off, as she sat and sang at the piano. As far as they could gather, she was never low-spirited or dull. She read a great deal, and used to dress herself very carefully; but, as time went on, the old housekeeper began to fancy that she got a little vacant in her answers, and longed for spring to come again, and for her ladyship to get out on the downs.

She had only one visitor, Mr. Compton; and he would come down sometimes for a night on business, at which time she would entertain him at dinner. She would talk about George and his whereabouts, and calculate on the period of his return, strange to say, with less eagerness as the time went on. Her present life, whatever its objections might be, was at all events peaceful; and that was much, after that dreadful letter, the recollection of which came on her sometimes yet with a chill of horror. But she was gradually forgetting that; nay, was going a very good way to work to forget a good deal more.

Baby was not condemned to entire seclusion with his mother. He had been ill once, and a doctor being brought in, ordered the child two hours' exercise every day. And so, every day, he was consigned to Reuben, who led him away on a little pony through all the secluded coverts where his duty lay, and, in his pleasant way, introduced him to all the wild wonders of the gamekeeper's world.

The child got very much attached to Reuben, as did most people; and Gerty had such full confidence in him, and the boy grew so rosy and hale under his care, and it was so pleasant to hear the boy's stories of his day's adventures at their little tea, that she gave Reuben every liberty about hours, and Reuben himself, being fond of the company of children, would very often keep the child out late.

The winter dragged on, and Gerty began to anticipate her release, when, on a wild March evening with a lurid sunset, the boy came home and told his mother that they had met the devil walking in a wood. That the devil had been glad to see Reuben, and wished (as Baby believed) for Reuben to give him (Baby) to him (the devil). That Reuben had been very much frightened at first, but after a time had coaxed the devil away, and talked to him in a dark place among the trees; during which time he (Baby) had sat on the pony all alone, and let it eat grass. Upon this Gerty sat on him like a commissioner. To Question, 250, "My gracious goodness child, how near were you to him?" the Answer was "Ever so far. Reuben ran forward when he saw him, to prevent his catching hold of me." Question 251, "Did you see his face?" Answer, "No. But I know it

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was the devil." Question 252, "Why?" Answer, "Because he went on going to and fro, like he did in Job." Question 253, "Had you no other reason for thinking it was the devil?" Answer, "Yes." Question 254, "What?" Answer, "Reuben said it was." Question 255, "What did Reuben say besides, in the name of goodness?" Answer, "He said that, if I told you a word about it, the beadle would come down the chimney at twelve o'clock at night, and carry me off to apprentice me into the wooden-leg and glass-eye business." Question 256, "How do you come to remember Reuben's nonsense so well, you little silly thing?" Answer, "Because he kept on saying it all the way home." Question 257, "Why did you tell me if Reuben told you not?" Answer, "I don't know." Question 258, "Do you want any more marmalade?" Answer, "Yes."

Lady Hillyar rang the bell, and asked if Reuben was gone. It seemed he was not, and it seemed, moreover, that he had distrusted his little friend's discretion, for, on being shown up, he was in a most perfect state of London assurance, ready for Gerty at all points. Before the conversation could begin, it was necessary that Baby should go to the nursery, and, as it appeared (after a somewhat lively debate, in which Gerty adduced the fate of the children who had called after — or, as she expressed it, "joed" — the prophet Elisha, without the slightest effect) that he would not go there unless Reuben took him, Reuben had to take him accordingly. After a long absence he reappeared, and the conversation began.

"Well! if this don't bang wattle gum,"* began Gerty, who was wild with curiosity, and forgot her manners accordingly, "I wish I may be buried in the bush in a sheet of bark. Why I feel all over centipedes and copper lizards. For you to go and see the devil with that dear child, and teach him not to let his mother know, and in Whitley Copse too, of all places, and you old enough to be his father. You ought to be —— You ought to get —— Why, you ought to have your grog stopped ——"

"My lady, indeed ——"

"No, I don't mean that. You must n't be angry with me; I was n't really in a pelter. You ain't going to be cross with me, are you, Reuben? You did see the devil now, did n't you? That dear child would never deceive his own mother. Come, I am sure you did."

"I only *told* him it was the devil, my lady."

"Then who was it? It could n't have been Black Joe, be-

* This is a very low expression. If Mrs. Oxton had been there she never would have dared to use it. In the bush, when a chemist's shop is not handy, the gum of the acacia is used instead of chalk mixture.

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cause we heard of his being hung, soon after we went into Cooksland, for putting a chest of drawers on an old woman to get her money out of her, though why he could n't have taken it out of her pocket —— He was very like the devil, my father used to say, though I don't believe he ever saw him, — the devil I mean: he saw Black Joe often enough, for he was assigned to him; and I remember his getting fifty for sauce one shearing time ——"

"It was n't him, my lady," said Reuben, arresting the torrent. "It was a young man of the name of Ned, that keeps a beer 'us in Old Gal Street, Caledonia Road. That 's about who it was, my lady. A terrible chap to swear and carry on in his drink, my lady, and I smelt him as I was a-coming through the copse, that he 'd been at it; and I says, I says, Dash it all, I says, there 'll be high life below stairs with him in about two twists of a lamb's tail; and I says to the kid, — I ask pardon, the young 'un; I ask pardon again, the young master, — Stay here, I says, while I go and has it out with him, for the ears of the young, I says, should never be defiled, nor their morality contaminated, with none of your Greenwich Fair, New Cut, Romany patter. And so I goes to him, my lady." Reuben, whose bark was now laboring heavily in the trough of a great sea of fiction, continued, "I goes to him, and ——"

"I think you were perfectly right, my dear Reuben," said Gerty. "I thank you for your discretion. My father had the greatest horror of the same thing. None of my sisters ever interchanged words with a hand in their lives. And, indeed, I never should have done so; only I was let run wild in consequence of mamma's being so busy getting my sisters off, and papa being always in town after that dreadful drop in tallow, which ultimately flew to his stomach at the Prince of Wales, and took him off like the snuff of a candle. For my part ——"

Here Reuben, who, having got breathing-time, had rapidly carried on his fiction in his head, took it up again: not at the point where he had dropped it last, but at the point at which he had arrived when he found himself capable of going in for another innings. So *he* began. Which left Gerty in the position of the reader of the third volume of a novel, who has had no opportunity of reading the second.

"And so, my lady, his aunt said that, with regard to the five-pound note, what could n't be cured must be endured; and with regard to the black-and-tan terrier bitch, what was done could n't be helped, though she hoped it would n't happen again. And they had in the gallon, my lady, and then they tossed for a go of turps and a hayband, — I ask your ladyship's pardon, that means a glass of gin and a cigar; and that is all I know of the matter, I do assure you."

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How the conversation would have come to an end, save by the sheer exhaustion of both parties, had not Baby reappeared in his night-shirt to look after Reuben, we cannot say. It concluded, however; and, however much nonsense Reuben may have talked, he certainly gained his object, that of mystifying Gerty, and making her forget the subject in hand. He wished her good-night with a brazen front, and, having received a kind farewell, departed.

Now what had happened was shortly this. That evening, as he had been leading the child's pony through a dense copse, Sir George Hillyar had stepped out from behind a holly, and beckoned to him.

Reuben was very much astonished, for he supposed Sir George to be at Florence, but he let go the pony and came forward at once. Sir George looked wild, and, as Reuben thought, dissipated; he caught Reuben's hand, and said, —

"Ha! One single face left in all the world, and all the rest chattering ape-heads. How are you, my boy?"

Reuben was well, and very glad to see Sir George. "Lady Hillyar would have a pleasant surprise," he said, but, looking at Sir George's appearance, very much doubted it.

"She must know nothing. Not a soul must know anything but yourself. What child is that?"

"Your own, sir?"

"Poor little thing. Has he recognized me?"

"It would be impossible at that distance."

"Meet me to-morrow night, after dark, at this address. I have prowled all the afternoon to catch you, and I must be gone. Mind! not one word."

And so he had gone, leaving Reuben lost in wonder. However, his self-possession had prevented his betraying himself to Lady Hillyar. And, when he left her presence, he began to think of the address Sir George had given him; thinking probably that it would be at some West-end hotel. What was his astonishment to find that it was Lawrence Street, Chelsea, — a strange place, indeed, in which to find a baronet.

He got there a little after dark. He found the house at once, of course, having known every house there from his boyhood. It was a largish old house, with bow windows, which might have been respectable once, but which was now let out in floors and single rooms to poor people. Passing up the common staircase, into the close smell which there is in all that kind of houses, — a smell which had been familiar to him all his youth, and yet which seemed so repugnant after a year in the sweet fresh airs of Stanlake, — he went on to the second floor; and, before he had time to knock at the door of the front room, the door opened, and Sir George beckoned him in.

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"You stare to find me here, boy, hey?"

"I thought you at Florence, sir. But I am heartily glad to see you."

"Why do you hesitate to call me 'father,' Reuben?"

"Indeed, — well then, 'father,' — I hardly know. In spite of all the proofs you have given me of it from time to time, — in spite of all your kindness, — it seems strange. Hang it all, sir," continued he, with an air of petulance; "a man can't get used to everything all of a heap. And I ain't got used to this yet. And, what is more, I must have my time *for* getting used to it. Now."

His true Londoner's hatred for anything approaching sentiment made him positively angry for a moment. But his good humor came back directly, and he asked Sir George if he had given offence.

"Offence! not the least. I could have expected no more. I will make you like me."

"I do so already," said Reuben. "More than you think for, perhaps; but I don't like talking about that sort of thing. I never knew a chap worth three halfpence who was."

"Well," said Sir George, "I don't know but what you are right. Old boy, I 'll prove I care for you, by deeds, and we will talk no more on the subject. I have very little to ask you. You have kept me pretty well *au fait* with matters at Stanlake. Do you know what I have been doing abroad?"

"I do not, sir. Travelling?"

"And you might add gaming considerably, and you might add winning considerably. But I have been hard at work too. I have been hunting a wolf, Reuben."

"What wolf, sir?"

"Yes. An old gray wolf. I could never come up to him. He travelled fast, faster than I, who had to make inquiries, could follow him. But I tracked. Yes, by George, like an old inspector."

Sir George Hillyar had risen, and was standing with his back to the fire, biting his nails impatiently. Reuben sat in the gloom and watched him anxiously. His face was worn into deep lines, and his old scowl, which was so familiar to those who had known him in his worst times, was strong upon his face to-night.

"I tracked him," said he, speaking half-absently to Reuben, "from here to Paris, — to Geneva, — to Turin, — to Ajaccio. What did he want there, in the name of his master the Devil? And then to Naples, and Malta, and at Malta I lost him, and he *must* have come back to England. Have you seen him?"

He said this suddenly and sharply. Reuben asked whom he meant?

"Why, Samuel Burton. Did I not tell you? Have you seen him?"

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Reuben said, "No," but cunningly waited to hear more. "What might make Sir George so anxious to find him?" he asked.

"Nought! A little conversation. A few words in private. Nothing more."

He said this so strangely that Reuben would not say what was on the tip of his tongue. To wit, that Samuel Burton was at that present moment in Australia, and that he had in his pocket, at that moment, a letter announcing his arrival there. Reuben thought that it might be wise to keep these two good people apart. He was confirmed in his resolution by all that he saw and heard that night.

Sir George kept him there talking for a long time. The conversation was all on Sir George's part, and consisted almost entirely of a long diatribe against Samuel Burton: his ingratitude, his falseness, his villanous, abominable ingratitude over again, until Reuben was prompted to ask suddenly, "whether he had been up to anything fresh." Sir George said no, and talked more cautiously.

He asked about Stanlake; about the home farm; about the game; about Lady Hillyar. Had she been alarmed at night? Had there been any attempts at burglary? — there was a deal of property in the house. He knew for certain that the house had been robbed once, and that the thief had got in through the pantry window. Morton should be told of this; Reuben had better tell him. Reuben had better say that he had received a letter from Florence, and that Morton was to sleep in the house, and shoot any man who attempted to break in stone-dead. It was only justifiable homicide; the law would acquit him. Reuben had better say nothing about it; he did not wish any one shot. He was a miserable and most unhappy beggar, and wished he was dead, and that Erne was dead, and that they were all dead, and quietly asleep in their graves. He was not afraid of death, he said, and wondered that he was fool enough to live on. If he could bring himself to believe in a future state, of any sort or kind, he would blow out his brains that night. But he could n't, and annihilation was so horrible. He had not been used justly. He had had no chance. He appealed to Reuben. Reuben would not stand there and say that he had ever had a fair chance, — not such a chance as one gentleman would give another. The whole state of this world was horrible and abominable; a man was predoomed to ruin from his cradle. The Ultra-Predestinarians were right. He would publicly declare for them, and declare himself reprobate. He would not do it for nothing though; if his doom had been sealed from the first he would not go quietly to his punishment. No. That dog might be assured of his salvation, but

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he should feel the horror of sudden death. He would get face to face with that dog, and inflict on him a few moments of ghastly terror.

And so on. If any man cares, let him follow out poor Sir George Hillyar's frantic, illogical line of thought. It would be very easy, but is it worth while?

Sir George had worked himself into a state nearly frantic, and Reuben was sincerely distressed. At last he ventured up to him, and, laying his hand on his arm, besought him earnestly to be quieter. It had a sudden effect; Sir George grew calmer, and his rage died away into low mutterings.

Presently he told Reuben that he must go. He cautioned him not to mention his having seen him to any living soul, and so dismissed him.

"I will go and look at the outside of the old place," said Reuben to himself as soon as he was in the street. "I am fond of it for their sakes. What a kind lot they were! I wonder what they are doing now. So it's all broke off between Emma and Mr. Erne; more the pity."

Thinking in this way, Reuben passed through the narrow passage by the dissenting chapel, and soon stood before the old deserted house. Brown's Row was mainly gone to bed. Only Mr. Pistol, who had got off with a twelvemonth, was standing with three or four others under a lamp, and expressing his intention of slitting a certain worthy magistrate's throat from ear to ear. But, hearing a base groveller of a policeman coming round the corner, he swaggered off with a dignified silence in the direction of Church Street; and the Row was left in peace.

Reuben was glad of it, for he was (for him) in a sentimental mood, and felt very much inclined to stand and watch the old house, bathed in the light of the early spring moon. He leant in the shadow under the pent-house of the Burton's forge, and watched the dear old place with something very like emotion,—when all at once Sir George Hillyar came up, without seeing him, and disappeared round the back of the house.

Prompted both by curiosity and by reckless love of adventure, Reuben immediately followed him. When he got round the house, no one was there, and it was evident that Sir George had got into the yard by a broken place in the palings; and Reuben, looking in, saw him enter the old house by a back window which was left unclosed.

"Now, what is the meaning of this? and what on earth is he doing here?" thought Reuben, and immediately crouched down under the window. He heard Sir George on the stairs; and quickly, and with the silence of a cat, he followed him in and slipped off his shoes.

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He found himself in the old familiar kitchen, and crouched down for fear of Sir George lighting a candle. He did not, however, but passed out, and began ascending the great staircase.

What made Reuben feel sure that he was going up to his old room, — to the room which had been the scene of so much before? Reuben was puzzled to find a reason for such a strange proceeding; and yet he was absolutely certain that he was going there. So certain that he followed more rapidly than was quite prudent.

The moon flooded the house, through every available cranny, with a dull weird light; and Sir George was easily kept in sight. It was the more easy to do it, as there was a brisk wind abroad, which filled the house with rustling sound, and hushed the footsteps of the follower. He passed on, higher and higher, till he passed into Reuben's room, and disappeared. Reuben, waiting a few minutes, cautiously peeped in at the half-opened door. His old bed stood there still; it was barely worth removing; but there were other evidences of Sir George having been there before. The bed was roughly covered with a blanket, — bed enough for an old Australian; and there were other signs of habitation, in the midst of which sat Sir George at a broken old table, with his revolver lying before him. Reuben gave one look at him, and then stole silently away, his retreat being covered by the innumerable mysterious noises of the deserted place.

CHAPTER LIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: THE CLAYTON MÉNAGE.

"At last," I cried out, as I saw Erne come slinging on through the forest towards me. "Why, I thought I had lost you forever."

"Old boy, I am so glad to see you. I was determined to make you wait for letting Emma go away before my appointed visit. You see I have avenged myself on you by keeping you waiting some six months for a sight of my handsome mug. It was only your wedding which brought me over at last. And how are you all?"

"We were all very well."

"You have seen Joe's Report," said Erne, "of course. Is it not masterly? I am so rejoiced; but no one ever doubted his abilities but himself. The conclusion pleased me; I heard the

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old fellow's voice as I read it, and saw him emphatically rolling his head at every period; it is so exactly like Joe. 'Our tender mercies to these people will be found to be but cruel, if we do but raise them out of a sea of physical misery which was overwhelming them in the Old World, to plunge them into a moral and intellectual one in this. In examining the condition of the class of boys on which you ordered me to report, I found an insolent ignorance, a sullen impatience of control, which gave me the deepest concern, and which has settled forever in my own mind the question of compulsory education. Unarmed with such powers as I should derive from the prestige which is naturally the right of an officer appointed by Government, and by a law rendering education compulsory, I for one, speaking as a schoolmaster, would refuse to undertake the task of training these sullen and ignorant young barbarians, who in a few years' time will be exercising the full privileges of citizens.'—I pause for a reply."

"That last sentence ain't in it, is it?" I asked.

"No," said Erne, laughing, "but it should be, in the fitness of things. The fault of the Report is that it is all through too much in the 'Romans, countrymen, and lovers' style. Joe is uncertain of himself, afraid of some old lurking bit of slang or vernacular turning up and undoing him when he don't expect it; and so he wraps up all his excellent common sense in fine words. Never mind; the set he is in now will soon cure him of that. Well, and how is she?"

"Emma? She is very well; she seems not to like Palmerston. Joe is never at home, and, when he is, is utterly pre-occupied. Since his evidence before that commission, and the order for him to make a special Report, he has been utterly unfit to attend to the slightest domestic arrangement. She says he would never get fed if it was n't for her."

"He will be Secretary before he dies. What a capacity for work there is in him, as well as genius. My father used to remark it. Noble old Joe!"

"And how have you been, my dear friend?" I asked.

"I have been well enough, Jim. But I am not comfortable."

"No?"

"Why, no. The people I am with don't suit me."

"The Claytons."

"Yes. I like him very well. He is an honest, reckless fellow, a master of his business. He has a great horror of a man who drinks, or a man who reads.—'I never knew any good come of reading,' he continually says; 'my dear sir, you will never succeed unless you give it up. It's worse than drinking, in my opinion.'—And he is quite in earnest. Ha! ha!"

"But about *her?*" I asked.

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"Well, I don't know. There 's something odd about her. A *Je ne sais quoi*, a sort of Haymarket air altogether. But she was not so bad till Mrs. Quickly came."

"Mrs. Quickly!" I cried out.

"Yes. Oh, by the bye, she says she knows all of you. I forgot. Yes, Mrs. Quickly has come and taken up her quarters there, altogether."

"What does Clayton say to that?"

"Oh, he approved of it at first, there being no family. 'You see, sir,' he said to me, 'It 's as well to have some company for her. It is very dull for a woman in the bush without children.'"

"Take care of Mrs. Quickly, Erne."

"Oh, you need n't caution me," said Erne, laughing. "*I* know the cut of her ladyship's cap. Unluckily, Mrs. Quickly is troubled with a sinking in her stomach, and requires stimulants, which has resulted in this, that neither Mrs. Quickly nor Mrs. Clayton are ever exactly sober. Mrs. Quickly, being, I suppose, the more seasoned vessel, carries her drink in a more workman-like manner than Mrs. Clayton. When Mrs. Quickly is sufficiently intoxicated to throw herself into my arms and kiss me, you generally find that Mrs. Clayton has been forced to go and lie down. As for old Parkins, he never gets drunk. Drink what he will it makes no difference to *him*."

"Does Clayton know of this?"

"Yes, but he has n't strength of mind to stop it entirely. He is exceedingly attached and devoted to his wife. He says that, as soon as he can get rid of Mrs. Quickly, it will be all right again. She never did it till that woman came. But Mrs. Quickly won't go. Parkins says she has got the whip hand of Mrs. Clayton, and knows when she is well off."

"I dare say. But who is Parkins?"

"Parkins? Oh, why he is Parkins. He is a queer-looking card; but very agreeable, remakably well-bred. He came there after Mrs. Quickly at first, I believe, but took such a fancy to me that he has been there a good deal. Clayton says he will leave me his fortune. He is very well off, looking for an investment."

"I hope you may be his heir."

"I have very little hope, Hammersmith; for, however excellent his testamentary intentions may be, I doubt whether he will have an opportunity of carrying them into execution for the next forty years. He looks like a liver."

"Cannot he stop this miserable drinking?"

"He does all he can, to do him justice; but somehow he seems afraid of Mrs. Quickly. The whole lot of them, with the exception of Clayton, have just the air of people who had made

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their fortunes by robbing poor-boxes. Nice sort of company for a young gentleman of my bringing-up: I don't much care about it so long as they don't kick up a row, but I am getting very tired of it. I shall make a bolt one of these days."

That evening Erne and I took a walk together up the Brougham river. It is an exception to the majority of rivers in Australia, for, being snow-fed, and coming to a great extent through limestone, it keeps up a full crystal current through the hottest summer. It is the favorite resort of the lovers of Romilly to this day, for it is so deeply embowered in fern-tree and lightwood that one may sit in the shade and dream of cool English woods in August: dream only like her who

> "Woke, and the bubble of the stream
> Fell, and without the steady glare."

But, however, fern-trees and lightwood must do, where oak and elm are unprocurable.

The Brougham is popular, too, as a resort for anglers; those pretty little salmonidæ, which are so singularly like grayling, leaving the larger river, the Erskine, prefer the more aerated waters of the Brougham and swarm up it in thousands. As we passed along the bank which wound up the valley near the river, we saw many of our neighbors bathing and fishing; but, getting farther from the town we seemed to leave life behind us, and began to think we were alone in the forest: when, coming to a deep pool, in a turn of the river, walled in with dark shrubs and feathering tree-ferns, we came on a solitary man, who sat on a log fishing by himself: on seeing whom, Erne exclaimed, "Hallo! why *here's* Parkins," and, going up to him, and having affectionately shaken hands, sat down and began a conversation.

Mr. Parkins was affectionately glad to see Erne, but the principal expression of his face was that of intense amusement,—amusement at my expense, for I was standing looking at him and at Erne with staring eyes and open mouth. This Mr. Parkins, this new friend of Erne's, was no less a person than my cousin Samuel.

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CHAPTER LIV.

EMMA'S VISIT.

"THIS is my friend Mr. Burton," said Erne.

"I formerly had the acquaintance of Mr. James Burton," said Samuel sarcastically; "nay, on one occasion I took the liberty of saving his life."

I blushed, and stammered out some commonplace. I was not quite sure that I had not done a rather ill-conditioned act in passing him before on many occasions without speaking to him. I hoped he was well.

He was quite satisfied at once, and began to talk kindly. He congratulated me on my approaching marriage; and, although he must have been considerably disconcerted and annoyed at the impending discovery, by Erne, of the fact that his refined friend, Mr. Parkins, was identical with the transported valet of his brother, yet he never showed the slightest annoyance or vexation, but talked indifferently about his sport and about the weather, until we rose to walk homeward.

Erne was immensely astonished when I eagerly announced the fact to him; but he was quite as much amused as surprised.

"This completes the Clayton *ménage*," he said. "What an exceedingly funny lot of people we are! I am charmed at this discovery. I will pick Master Samuel's brains no end about his convict experiences. It will determine me to stay on with Clayton. Fancy being on intimate terms with a convict. But does it not strike you as curious that he and I should be accidentally thrown together?"

"I see nothing curious in it whatever," I said. "It is plain to me that he has found out where you are, and, taking advantage of this careless bush hospitality, has introduced himself into the house with you, for his own purposes. He has intentions with regard to you, but he is far too unfathomably cunning to let you know what they are. He is going to bid for a farm here."

"No; is he?"

"So they say. He is waiting here for the land sale."

"And when is that?"

"Next week. My father is going to buy heavily."

"I thought Dawson bought up everything hereabout."

"He is not going to bid against my father."

"That is a singular concession on his part. He is mad about

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Port Romilly. I know this for a fact: before the last great land sale a man had squatted on one of the lots, and had made money in some way or another. Dawson went to him and said, 'My man, I understand you are going to bid for this lot.' The man said yes, he was going to run it up. 'You can run it up if you like,' said Dawson, 'but, if you do, you 'll run yourself off it; for I'll have it if it costs 30,000*l.* You stay at home the day of the land-sale, and you may keep this house over your head; but go anigh that court that day, and out of this you go the week after.' The man wisely stayed at home, I believe."

I said, "Yes, the story is true. But on my father's mentioning his wish to own land here, Mr. Dawson immediately said that he would withdraw from competing for the lots which my father fancied. And so there is a fair chance for him, though he is desperately anxious about it."

"What sort of land is he going to buy?"

"A patch of 500 acres on the north slope of the Cape Wilberforce Mountain, about three miles from the sea. You passed it on the road coming here. A mile back. There's a burnt hut on it."

"It is poor land."

"No, capital vine land, with that aspect."*

"I wish him joy with it. I cannot sufficiently admire the generous liberality of our honorable friend Dawson. Why, my dear boy, that land would starve a bandicoot."

"How do you know?"

"Why, innocent! if you will get any bushman to tell you that land covered with Eucalyptus dumosus, vulgarly called Mallee, and exceedingly stunted specimens of that, will grow anything, I will tell him he knows nothing. Your father is, in my opinion, ill-advised."

And so the conversation dropped. About ten days after it was held I was married. Only the very night before, a steamer came in from Palmerston and brought Emma. She could not help coming, she said, and had altered her mind the very last thing. The steamers between Melbourne and Palmerston would call regularly at Port Romilly now. That was so very nice to think of, was n't it? It made her feel the separation less. Only three days would bring her among us at any time, in case of illness or anything. And such a beautiful voyage, she said. The sky was so bright, and the great ocean-roll so long and so gentle. She had sat on the deck all day and all night, watching the coast. There had been long stretches of low sand-beach in some places, and then a majestic cape. Sometimes the land piled itself up

* A northerly aspect at the Antipodes is of course the same as a southern one here.

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into awful tiers of dark forest, one rising behind the other; and sometimes these would break away, and show low rolling plains stretching into the interior, with faint blue mountains beyond. There were islands, too, which one sailed through, on which the foot of man had never rested since the world began; some low, some high and fantastically-shaped, but all covered with clouds of changing sea-birds, and ringed with the leaping silver surf which never slept. "Sometimes, darling," she continued, — for we were alone together, and the house was all asleep save us two, and her head was on my shoulder, — "Sometimes I thought that I would pray that after death my soul might take the form of one of those wild sea-doves, and hover and float in the wind and the sunshine free of care. I will come and sit on your shoulder, dear, and you will know that it is me, won't you?"

"I would sooner have you as you are, my sister."

"Jim, sometimes I am weary of my life. My task is too much for me; I wish I was at rest. I miss all the home faces. I miss you, dear. I miss our mother, and I am utterly alone in Palmerston. And oh, brother, I love him so dearly! This sight of him to-day has been so precious! Oh! what shall I do, what shall I do?"

I did not dare to ask her to forget her resolution now. This was not the time to urge Erne's suit. Her mood was far too serious and sacred a one to be interfered with by any personal whim of my own. Not only did I feel this, but she knew that I felt it, and opened her heart to me in perfect confidence. I only told her that I loved her better than any other woman in the world, save one. I only begged her forgiveness for any clumsiness of expression, by which I might have hidden my love for her. I only comforted her with hopes such as I could give. Things might alter in many ways; and there might be a brighter future. After a time she grew calm again, and she sat with her head on my shoulder through the short summer night, until the crystal dawn flashed upon the tree tops, and told me that the morning of my marriage was come.

And in the morning she and Erne parted. When will they meet again? Ah! when?

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CHAPTER LV.

THE LAND SALE.

My marriage was a most unnoticeable one. The sort of thing that is just worth mentioning, nothing more. It has nothing to do with the story whatever.

I do not think that I should have taken the trouble to mention it at all, had it not been for this. There was a little cloud over it, and that cloud hung in the very last place where I liked to see a cloud. It was in my father's face.

He approved of the business in every way. We were getting rich and prosperous. He loved my pretty little sweetheart with all the chivalrous devotion of his great gentleman's soul; but there was a cloud on his face, which reflected itself on mine. I thought I had penetration enough to find out the cause which threw its shadow there.

Trevittick had been a good and faithful partner to us, and, in spite of his moroseness and his fanaticism, we had got to be very fond of him. Morose he was at times, but he was never unkind: his devotion to my mother was that of a true gentleman; and his kindness to the younger ones, children no longer now, was most fatherly and genial. Fred, in fact, put him as A 1 in his affections since the loss of Erne. But now it was painfully evident to me that poor Trevittick had stepped a little beyond the limits of fanaticism, and was rapidly becoming lunatic. I also perceived that my father was perfectly aware of the fact, but would not open his lips, even to me, in hopes of a favorable change in the poor fellow's malady.

This was the reason of the shadow on my father's face at the time of my wedding; and I was sorry to be obliged to confess to myself, after close watching of Trevittick's behavior, that there was only too good reason for it.

I cannot remember the exact time when I first noticed decided symptoms of his aberration; but it was long before my marriage. It was a Sunday, though, for he had been in the bush all day alone: which was a habit he acquired soon after our arrival at Port Romilly. He had gained so much influence over my father that my father used to allow him to expound a chapter and give an extempore prayer the first thing every Sunday morning. After this he used to depart into the bush, and only come home late at night, leaving my father to blunder through the Litany,

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and an orthodox sermon in the forenoon, before his family, as best he might; which was not very well, for my father's education had been limited, and the slowest of Bible clerks might have given him half the distance, and said amen before him, easily. On this particular Sunday Trevittick was later home than usual. There was no one up but myself, and, when he came in, having taken a long draught of cold tea (he was a strict teetotaller) he sat down opposite me, lit his pipe, and told me that on that very morning he had arrived at the unalterable conviction that he was condemned to everlasting reprobation.

I asked him why.

He said that hitherto he had always believed himself convinced of sin, and regenerate; that he had believed himself possessed of a lively faith. But that only proof of a lively faith was works: that he believed with the rest of the Brianites that the elect could not sin, whereas he, ever since he had come to Port Romilly, had been a habitual Sabbath-breaker; that his faith, not having resulted in works, was not lively; that therefore he was condemned everlastingly. And not only that; he had had a revelation. It had come to him as he was sitting that very day by the burnt hut. There came a shiver of wind through the shrubs, and a voice spoke in his heart as it went by and told him this:— the unmentionable sin was to believe yourself elect when you were not so, and he had committed this sin.

I tried to combat all this midsummer madness as best I might. I spoke such platitudes to him as I could lay hold of at the time, and my arrows were very few, and drawn from all sorts of quivers. To flatter his humor, I told him that there was little doubt but that he had fallen away from original righteousness, as we all had done. I recommended him to read "Winslow on Personal Declension and Revival," a book which I confessed I had found tough myself, but which would suit his case exactly. And so I went on, trying to argue against a dull, settled, obstinate fanaticism, until I lost my temper, and told him that, if there were an unforgivable sin, he would find that it consisted in doubting the sufficiency of the great Sacrifice; which was probably the only piece of good sense which I uttered during the argument.

But it had no effect; he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and left me with an expression of calm scorn. The next Sunday he rambled away just the same; and I, sitting up for him after every one else was gone to bed, had another innings with him, in which I got completely worsted.

He was equally assured of his own condemnation. Nothing could ever shake that conviction. Condemnation was to be everlasting; no reasonable man could doubt that. But he said that he would not condescend to allow this conviction to make the

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very least alteration in his morality. His life had always been blameless (and, indeed, he was right), and it should continue to be so. He would continue this sin of Mammon-worship on the Sabbath, because it would benefit others, and might keep them from temptation. Otherwise, he would watch the uprightness of his walking more closely than ever.

In my desperation I asked him why should he do so.

He answered scornfully, "Had I any proper pride? Was I only righteous from fear of punishment? And suppose it came into God's great scheme that I should be punished everlastingly, either for an example, or for some deep hidden reason, was I therefore to doubt the goodness and justice of God?" I had nothing to say, but I felt inclined to say with Polonius, "If this be madness, there is method in it." But I did n't.

The next phase of his lunacy — one which had not, to my knowledge, made its appearance before, but which seems to me to be the somewhat natural result of the state of mind which I have attempted to describe — was this: He became abjectly superstitious. He began to revive all the old West country witch-quackeries, which his religion had taught him to consider not quackeries, but arts of the Devil. For instance, he got Fred to hold a lot of ink in his hand, under the new moon, and look into it, to see what he saw. That dear boy instantly saw Guy Fawkes and the Devil walking arm in arm over Battersea Bridge, which, however interesting in a scientific point of view, led to no practical results; and Fred, being naturally seized with a panic, made himself all over a gore of ink, as my mother expressed it, — she having stepped in with an absolute veto against the repetition of any such unorthodox manœuvres. I expected at this time to find him using the famous Cornish superstition of the divining rod, but, to my astonishment, he spoke of it with unutterable scorn, as a mere delusion of ignorant and unscientific quacks.

He grew worse, as I said, just about the time of my marriage; he would start up in the night and pray, and make strange incomprehensible ejaculations. Tom Williams had often considerable difficulty in getting him quiet again. But the most awful night he had with him was the night before the land sale: it reacted on my father so that I was afraid he would scarcely get through the day's business. Trevittick seemed possessed of a dumb devil, and spent the whole night in walking silently up and down, with a short, snatching gait, like a tiger in its cage. Tom said it was worse than any trick he had played him, and nearly scared him to death. Trevittick looked very ghastly the morning of the sale too; the dark brown in his complexion remained, but the red was all gone, and he looked more like an unhealthy mulatto than a rich-colored Cornishman.

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rybody was up early, with a full determination to make f it; for land sales were few and far between in those this one, coming a few days before Christmas, would y good starting point for the Christmas saturnalia. en caught their horses, and rode about; or, if they orses of their own, borrowed some one else's: at the same was begun a long, objectless, and incomprehensible game of cricket, in the which a man, by dexterous manœuvring, might have sixteen or seventeen innings, and which lasted from cock-crow till long after curfew. At the same time, also, everybody began to bathe, and kept on bathing, while they were not riding about or cricketing, all day. Harry confided to me that he had been "in" eight times. At about nine o'clock the black fellows arrived, and the dogs began barking "as though there were bears in the town," and barked on until the black fellows left, late in the afternoon.

At about ten the auctioneer arrived, and with him the Hon. Mr. Dawson. Soon after this all the elders of the township adjourned into the little court-house to look at the plans, and I, having been married a week, felt several degrees more dignified than the Governor, and took my place among the others with becoming gravity. After some time the court was filled, and the business began. Mr. Dawson sat next the auctioneer, and, just as he began to speak, my cousin, dressed in black, came up and thrust himself in among the foremost.

"Here 's the Devil come for old Jack Dawson," said some one who was standing in the crowd, and everybody laughed, for my friend's popularity was not high in the township. The auctioneer began: "Silence, gentlemen, pray silence."

"Silence yourself, you old scrubber," was the polite rejoinder; the gentleman who spoke being slightly in liquor. "What 's the good of such a farce as this here? Why, there sits old Jack Dawson, the blacksmith, with his pockets full of money, ready to buy up the whole boiling, scot and lot; while a poor man can't get a bit of land to put his foot on. He is going to be king at Port Romilly, mates; and we 're to be his humble servants. Blow that, I say."

There was a murmur of discontent through the hall. I saw Mr. Dawson wince; for he could not bear unpopularity. The first lot was put up, — a lot of twenty acres, with frontage on the Erskine. After a brisk competition it was knocked down to my cousin Samuel, for the high sum of ten pounds an acre. Mr. Dawson did not compete.

Neither did he for the next lot, or the next. It was evident that he had been affected by the sarcasms of the drunken man, and the evident applause with which they were received. All

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the lots with wharfage along the Erskine went without a sign from him: and next the land further back towards the Cape Wilberforce mountain, was put up. "Your father is mad," Erne said to me. "He is letting his fortune slip away under his eyes; why on earth don't he bid? All the best land is going. Do pray him to bid for this she-oak lot; it 's only 640. Why, it would grow forty bushels to the acre; I was over it yesterday."

My father's folly did seem to me incomprehensible. I pushed through to him, and pointed out what Erne had said. He was very pale and anxious; but all I could get out of him was, "All right, old man, leave it to me."

As the sale went on there was less and less competition, as the land grew both poorer in quality from being nearer the mountain, and being further removed from the river and the bay. Several lots just under the mountain went for the upset price; and at last the sale was nearly concluded, and the people began to go out. Three lots remained to be sold, and these three comprised a large portion of the mountain itself. As lot 67 was mentioned I saw my father and Mr. Dawson exchange glances, and everybody began to be funny.

'Lot 67, gentlemen," began the auctioneer; "a most eligible lot, gentlemen. If you were to ask me my opinion, as between man and man, I should say the most eligible lot which I have had the honor of tempting you with to-day. Twelve hundred and eighty acres, or shall we say, two of 640. The soil, though not fertile, is dry, the situation is elevated, the air invigorating and salubrious, and the scenery romantic. On a clear day, as I am informed by our venerable and respected harbor-master, the light-house on Cape Pitt is distinctly visible to the naked eye."

Somebody said that with a glass you might see old Jack Dawson sanding the men's sugar at Myrnong, sixty miles off. This unexpected attack on my unoffending friend resulted in a violent and acrimonious personal fracas between Mr. Dawson and the gentleman who had so rudely assailed him, in which several joined; during which the noble gentleman so far forgot himself in the heat of debate as to say, that, "if he got any more cheek from him, or any other carroty-haired, 'possum-headed, forty-acre, post and rail son of a seacook, he would knock his head into the shape of a slush-lump in about two minutes." Peace being restored in about ten minutes, and the Hon. Mr. Dawson being left in a great heat, the auctioneer went on with the description of the lot, only once interrupted by the Hon. Mr. Dawson, suddenly, irrelevantly, and gratuitously informing the company, in a loud and defiant voice, that he would find a young smith, not twenty-one, who should fight the best man in that room for a hundred pound a side.

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Much as I was flattered by this proof of my friend's confidence, I was glad no one came forward. The auctioneer concluded.

"Now whom can I tempt with this lot? Can I tempt you, Mr. Dawson?"

"Yes, you can, sir," retorted the still angry Mr. Dawson. "And I'll have this lot, sir, and my friend Mr. Burton shall have the next, sir, if it cost fifty thousand pound, sir. Now. And, if any individual chooses to run this lot up out of spite, sir, whether that individual has red hair or green hair, sir, I will punch that individual's head immediately after the termination of these proceedings, sir, and knock it against the blue stone and mortar which compose the walls of this court-house. Now, sir."

However, nobody, I suppose, caring to get his head punched for a whim, the lot was knocked down to him, and immediately afterwards my father stepped forward, looking as white as a sheet.

"Now we come to lot 68, commonly known by your fellow-townsmen as the Burnt Hut lot; exactly similar to lot 67, just knocked down to the Hon. Mr. Dawson, as a site for his new country house. Now who would like to have our honored legislative councillor for a neighbor? What gentleman of fortune can I tempt with this lot? The lot is up. At one pound an acre. Will any one bid one pound an acre?"

"I will," said my father, in a queer, hoarse voice. I saw that he was moistening his dry lips with his tongue. I began to grow deeply interested, half frightened.

"Going at a pound. Come, gentlemen, if any one is going to bid, be quick. It is the last lot."

There were but few left: and no one of them spoke. The hammer came down, and I saw Mr. Dawson clutch my father's arm.

"The land is yours, Mr. Burton. If you'll be good enough to step up and sign, I'll be able to get on as far as Stawell to-night. There is a good deal of snow-water coming down the Eldon this hot weather, and I don't like that crossing-place after dark."

Thanks to James Oxton's excellent conveyancing bill, lands with a title direct from the Crown were transferred to the purchaser in about ten minutes. In that time my father was standing outside the court-house, with his papers in his hand, with Mr. Dawson beside him.

"Where's Trevittick?" almost whispered Mr. Dawson.

"Go seek him at home, Jim, and fetch him here," said my father in the same tone.

I went quickly home with a growing awe upon me. Every

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one was behaving so queerly. My awe was not dissipated by my finding Trevittick, with his head buried in the blankets, praying eagerly and rapidly, and Tom Williams standing by as pale as a ghost.

"This is the way he has been carrying on this last hour," said poor Tom. "I can't make nothing of him at all."

I went up to him and roused him. "Trevittick," I said, "father has got the bit of land he wanted."

He jumped up and clutched me by both arms. "Jim," he said, "if you're lying —— If you're lying —— If you're lying ——"

We walked out and joined the two others, and all walked away towards the hill in silence. The boys were bathing, the cricketers were shouting, and the quaint-scattered village bore a holiday look. The neighbors were all sitting out at their doors, and greeted us as we went by: but yet everything seemed changed to me since the morning. I almost dreaded what was to come, and it seems to me now that it all happened instantaneously.

We crossed the low lying lands which had been sold that day, and came to our own, — a desolate, unpromising tract, stretching up the side of the mountain which formed Cape Wilberforce, about three miles from the sea. The land bought by Mr. Dawson was similar to our own, separated from it by a rib of trap rock; both lots were just as Erne described them, but ours was rather the rockier of the two.

It was soon over. Trevittick took a hammer and some gads from behind a rock, and, going up to a low ledge, set them in, and began working furiously. Once he struck aside and hit the rock, and the rock, instead of clinking, gave forth a dull thud. In a few minutes Trevittick had succeeded in detaching a piece about two feet square, the broken side of which shone strangely in the sun. It was a mass of solid, gleaming, virgin copper.

The murder was out now. With the exception of one on Lake Superior, and one in South Australia, my father was the proprietor of the richest copper mine in the world.

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CHAPTER LVI.

THE BURNT HUT COMPANY.

THE following are some extracts from the leader of the *Palmerston Sentinel* a short time after the affair of the sale:—

"Athenæus, in his 'Deipnosophists,' tells us that the ancient Carians used, at the annual festivals of Venus, to crown with rosemary the luckiest man of his year in front of the principal temple. For public ceremonies of this kind we are not wholly unprovided. Rome had her Forum, Athens her Areopagus, Corinth her Sisipheum; so Palmerston has her Government Block. Let Mr. James Burton, the Port Romilly blacksmith, be carried up there; let him be crowned with a wreath of Kennedya; for assuredly such fortunes as his, scarce ever befell one of the Audax Iapeti genus before. A discovery has transpired, in the fertile and salubrious district of Port Romilly, which promises to elevate Palmerston into one of the principal commercial emporiums of the civilized globe. The bullock's-hide of Dido which first traced the walls of the future Carthage will in future go down to posterity with the theodolite of Captain Snig, the gallant and intelligent engineer officer who first traced the streets of Palmerston; and the venerable and vivacious statesman whose name it bears must be content to share futurity with the city to which he stood *in loco parentis*. 'Oh, si angulus iste!' have we been exclaiming, ever since the foundation of the colony. We have been blessed with fertile lands, with full-fed rivers, with boundless forests, with numberless flocks and herds. We have made a material progress greater than that of any nation in ancient or modern times. One thing had been denied to us. One thing made us jealous of South Australia, to which colony we are in all other respects, physical and moral, so vastly superior. We wanted mineral wealth,—and we have got it. Yes. It may be attempted to be denied, but it is true. A Cornish miner, named Trevittick, has discovered that the whole of the Cape Wilberforce mountain is in an eminent degree cupriferous. In Burnt Hut Gully, purchased last week for twelve hundred and eighty pounds by Mr. James Burton, an enormous outcrop of pure metal itself takes place, similar to those on Lake Superior. On the next lot, Morepark Gully, bought at the same time, for the same price, by the Hon. Mr. Dawson, a small quarry, which has

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been opened, exhibits a mass of blue and green carbonates, eighteen feet thick. Negotiations are being attempted to be gone into for the purchase of Mr. Burton's claims, and his payment in shares, but without success hitherto. Mr. Trevittick considers that, as soon as he can get to work, he will raise a matter of four thousand tons of ore, of one kind and another, the first year."

So said the *Sentinel*. Mr. O'Callaghan of the *Mohawk* knew that the *Sentinel* would have a lot of classical allusions, and determined to have a bit of Latin of his own; but his first classical gentleman had gone to cricket-match, and so he had to do it himself, which was exceedingly awkward. However, he came of one of the bravest families of the bravest nation in the world, and, on the Galway fox-hunting rule of "either over it or through it," went at it manfully, seeing the hateful Mr. Dawson beyond, and savagely thirsting for his blood. His style, the intelligent reader will observe, if it is without the polish of that of Mr. Dickson of the *Sentinel*, is not wanting in a certain vigor of its own, —

"'Diabolus aurat propriis,' says the blessed St. Columb, in his 'Hours and Meditations,' — 'Sus tranquillus bibit lactem,' our venerable Malachi used to observe, giving a wicked wink with the eye of him the while, in sly allusion to Brian the Mighty himself. Old Jack Dawson, the blacksmith, is in luck again, and, by means of a rather nastier job than usual, he has doubled, nay quadrupled, his hitherto enormous wealth.

"It appears that Dawson's time, during his late visit to England, was passed, while not at Buckingham Palace, or *elsewhere*, in the smiddy of a somewhat blockish blacksmith, who has been unfortunate in business, and with whom Dawson discovered an infinite fund of fellow-feeling. This man and his family came out in the same ship with him; he was a great deal in their company at Palmerston, and finally he established them in business at Port Romilly, a place at which he had bought up every available acre of land, in anticipation of what has happened.

"He had bought up every piece of land but the right one, it appears. The smith Burton made the discovery, and determined on his plan for swindling the colony, and, in gratitude for favors received, offered Dawson half the plunder. Dawson, with true squatter meanness, accepted it.

"The short and the long of it is, that this man has discovered in Port Romilly a mountain, calculated to be sixteen times as big as Slieve Donad, and fourteen times as ugly as the Protestant cathedral, of solid copper from top to bottom, and he and old Dawson have bought the whole thing for an old song. The

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affair is about as ugly a looking thing as we have seen for a long time, and, if we mistake not, Dawson will be called on, in his place in the Upper House, to give certain personal explanations; but, nevertheless, there are some considerations of a pleasant nature associated with it. In future, not only shall we supply the manufacturers of Yorkshire with the fleecy spoils of the merino of Spain, or even, in time, the yet more priceless wools sheared from the back of the llama of Thibet, but the copper-smelting trade of South Wales will receive a new impetus by our enormous exports of copper, and London may yet see with envy, Swansea, a mightier metropolis than herself, arise on the shores of the Bristol Channel, — a metropolis nearer to, and more influenced by, the irradiating centre of human thought at Dublin."

Mr. O'Ryan was terribly angry at this article. He swore that, if O'Callaghan ever dared to write another article without having it looked over by a competent authority, he would start another Radical paper himself. Words passed between the two gentlemen, and, if it had not been for Miss Burke, they would have fought what O'Callaghan called a "jule" about it. The *Sentinel* got hold of the "llama of Thibet," and made great fun of it, and the *Mohawk* was getting the worst of the fight, when the eagle eye of Mr. O'Ryan caught the quotation from Athenæus about the ancient Carians, and the more he looked at it the less he liked it. There might have been a building at Corinth recently disinterred, but he thought the quotation from Athenæus was the weak place after all. He had the gravest scholastic suspicion of it. The Sisipheum at Corinth looked queer, very queer, although he knew that that gentleman was connected with the town, but this looked queerer still. The question was, was there such a thing as an Athenæus in the colony? The Roman Catholic bishop, on being appealed to, had not one, but he was good enough to step round to his Anglican brother, who, to his great delight, had one. O'Ryan carried it off to the *Mohawk* office in triumph. By three o'clock in the morning the first classical gentleman was in a position to report that there was no such passage whatever in the whole book. The next moment O'Callaghan hurriedly drained a tumbler of whisky-punch, seized his pen, and rushed to his desk with a snarl like an angry tiger. By daybreak he had sent his copy down stairs, and had walked out into the fresh morning air. The most polite term applied to the quotation from Athenæus was "scoundrelly forgery"; and the quarrel between the two papers continued for a long while, until, in fact, something happened which gave the colony something else to think of with a vengeance. It was

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the discovery of gold in New South Wales. But we shall have occasion to discourse of this presently.

The real truth about the discovery of the Burnt Hut copper-mine can be told very shortly. It was Trevittick's doing from beginning to end. He had been brought up a miner, or rather a mining-blacksmith. His father had been captain of a mine; and mining details, and mining speculations, had been familiar to him from his youth. In addition to this he had acquired, what his father possibly had not, a tolerable working knowledge of geology; and, having got himself up in that science and in working mechanics, not to mention a little mathematics, he, by way of bringing his science to bear, came to London — and shoed omnibus horses. By the curious accident of the man's getting so far attached to us as to follow us to Australia, his knowledge was brought to bear in a most singular way. At the first glimpse of the dolomite wall, he tells me, he began to get restless, and then (not to be tedious) he noticed the fact that all the various formations tended towards one point, Cape Wilberforce, and, when he neared that, he saw that it was nothing more than a great trap-dyke. After this, he says, if he had found a mountain of solid gold, he would not have been surprised.

Trevittick had a poor nose for gold. Those who have been in at the most glorious sport in the world, — gold-hunting, — may laugh at him. But he had a nose like a beagle for metals of some sort or another. He would have died sooner than break into a day's work; and hence came his Sunday rambles, and the self-accusatory frame of mind which I described in the last chapter, and which I at the time mistook for madness. Most people who have any brains, any power of original thought whatever, get more or less perplexed and illogical when the necessity comes upon them for breaking through old settled rules, hitherto considered as necessary to the scheme of the universe. I remember well the annoyance, vexation, and sulkiness, produced on a young Oxford gentleman who came to us at Port Romilly, by the loss of an irreplaceable tooth-brush in the bush. He went so far as to refuse his breakfast. (He got over it by dinner-time, but he was a man of singular strength of character.) Now, if a highly-educated Oxford gentleman finds his balance so far disturbed by the loss of his tooth-brush, and by the utter impossibility (he not being a Frenchman) of using anybody else's, how can we wonder at Trevittick, the first article of whose creed was a strict observance of what he chose to call the Sunday and Sabbath, being thrown off his balance by his being forced into a desecration of that sacred day?

He says that he was a long while before he got any indications whatever of either copper or lead. He was afraid to dig,

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and used only to prospect by chipping the rocks with a hammer. He had, however, many supernatural indications of the place made to him, but was too stupid to attend to them. Once a magpie had met him, and tried to make him follow it towards the place. Another time, on going over the place, his attention was called to it by a large black snake, which was actually coiled up on it; but, in his blindness and hardness of heart, he had killed the poor innocent creature, as he called this horribly venomous reptile, and so the truth was still kept from him. At last, one day, coming through a wood hard by, he had met a gray doe kangaroo, with her little one; she had skipped along, about fifty yards before him, beckoning to him to follow; he followed, and they led him to the Burnt Hut lot, and stopped when they came to the rock. Then the little one, the "Joey," had opened its mother's pouch and got in, and the mother skipped away with it and looked round no more. It was such a beautiful sight, he said, that he blessed the two pretty beasts in his heart; and instantly light was vouchsafed him. What he had hitherto taken to be lichen on the rocks he now perceived to be green carbonate of copper.

He announced the discovery to my father at once, who had a terrible time with him. My father got it into his head that his duty forced him to reveal the secret to Mr. Dawson. This, in Trevittick's mind, was sheer and absolute ruin. He was firmly assured that Mr. Dawson would bid over their heads, and that all their bright prospects would vanish forever. My father knew Mr. Dawson better. He talked over Trevittick, who sulkily acquiesced. Mr. Dawson was not unprepared for the result; he himself was aware of the existence of copper on some land of his own not a mile distant, and at once not only refused to compete with my father, but offered to advance him money to make the purchase. After a generous contest between these uneducated gentlemen, it was decided that they were to share the land between them.

What between Trevittick's distrust of Mr. Dawson and his dread of the discovery leaking out, he was pretty nearly out of his mind during the interval which elapsed before the land-sale. The moment it was over, his mind recovered its usual tone, and, although he used to tell, and firmly believe, such stories as that about the kangaroo, yet he confined this midsummer madness of his entirely to ghostly matters, and, as far as practical matters were concerned, was as shrewd and clever a manager as one could wish to have.

The Burnt Hut Copper Mining Company, consisted (ideally) of, 2,000 shareholders, at £5 per share. Of these shares, 1,000 were held by my father, 250 by Trevittick, and 250 by myself.

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The other 500 shares, being thrown into the market, produced £2,500, which was every farthing of working capital we started with. Trevittick raised 6,000 tons of ore in nine months, the net value of which was £72,000; cost of working under £20,000; and this £20,000 was in the main spent in prospective works; for, as for the copper, it was simply quarried for the first two years. "We shall do better next year, gentlemen," said Trevittick to the meeting of the shareholders, when shares had gone up from £5 to £150 in the market, and yet most of them held on like "grim death." "When I get into the ten-fathom level, gentlemen, we shall double all this, unless I am mistaken."

He did in fact so double it, but the depreciation of the cost of copper in Europe, and another circumstance, — to which I shall immediately allude by itself, as it has much to do with the web of the story, — about counterbalanced the improvement in quantity. Counting from the commencement to the present time, the income we have enjoyed from the mine may be put, taking one year with another, at £17,000 a year to my father, and about £8,000 a year to Trevittick and myself. The first thing Trevittick did with his money was to build a brick chapel in one of the main thoroughfares of Palmerston, — so large, so red, and so ugly, that, say the wags, the Governor's horses shied at it, and pitched Lady Bostock into the fishmonger's shop.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LAST OF THE FORGE.

And so my father had struck his last stroke at the anvil forever. One seldom feels joy at times of excitement. Johnson says, and sticks to it, that no man is ever happy but when he is drunk. Without going so far as that, one may say that happiness is mainly prospective and retrospective. How often can one remember to have said, "How happy I *am*," since childhood. *Then* I have been so happy that I could not eat. I particularly remember one summer Sunday that my father had helped me to the brown outside of the roast beef, — my favorite piece, — but that I was so happy in my anticipation of the afternoon's delight that I could n't eat it, and carried it out with me in a paper. I know that this first burst of good fortune is not one of the times I look back on in life as the pleasantest; the disturbance of old habits was too great. For one thing, all the children had to

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be sent off to boarding-school at Pitt, sixty miles away. Our Fred ran away the first month, and, after incredible adventures, was brought home by the blacks. The parting was a very sad business indeed; and my mother, in the heat of her feelings, boldly wished all the money at the deuse. Yes, there was a still sad house that evening; and I, coming across from my house in the twilight to see the dear old folks, found that they had wandered hand in hand into the forge, and were sitting there on a bench, side by side, silent.

I tried to slip away; but they had seen me, and made me come in and sit beside them. I felt a great disinclination to speak, and I was glad that my father spoke first.

"Come in to us, old chap," he said; "we 've got *you* left anyhow. This won't make no difference in *you;* you 're always the same, that 's one comfort."

"Why, take and drat your money, I say," said my mother, angrily; "God forgive me if I don't wish the hard times back again; we could see one another's faces then. Old man, the weariest day I ever had in my life has been this one, when we have just come into more money than we know what to do with. It 's hard enough, in all conscience, that Martha and me are to be reduced to keeping servants, and not allowed to touch so much as a carpet broom; but it 's harder to have my children took away just now when I am getting a bit stiff in the joints. You 'll never make a lady of me, — not if you was to give me a crown and sceptre, you would n't: and a pretty sort of a gentleman *you 'll* make, old man. Why, if our boys, as are going to be brought up gentlemen, were like any other boys, they 'd be ashamed on you. They *won't;* but that 's luck."

"Well, and that 's the best luck going, old woman," said my father. "What 's the good of hollering out after it 's all happened. You and me ain't got no call to show. Nobody need know anythink about us; we shall be able to go on much as usual, I reckon."

"You 're never the same man when you ain't at work, old chap," said my mother; "and, as for me, think what my feelings will be to have to sit by and see an awkward slut of a girl messing through the work that I could do so much better myself. And Jim's wife, Martha, too? Look at that girl's charing; why *I* never see anything like it, with the exception of Mrs. Chittle, who chared Park Villa at the end of a fortnight, nursing two. Take that girl away from her soap and brush, and she 'll peak and pine away, if she 's the girl I take her for: which she is."

"Well, she don't want to do much charing just now, old woman," growled my father.

"No, but she 'll want to after a bit again," said my mother. "In about six weeks she 'll have the old feeling come on her strong; and, mark my words, them as thwarts her thwarts her."

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"You 'd better have a saucepan and a bit of sandpaper took up to her in bed then," said my father. "Let her polish away at that."

This was undoubtedly a flagrant violation of my mother's rights as a woman; she would n't have stood it from the doctor himself. My father was making fun about subjects of which he was (officially) supposed to be utterly and entirely ignorant. His being the father of nine was nothing. He had shown a tendency to trifle with a subject which no woman worthy of the name will allow to be trifled with by a man for one instant. My mother came down on him.

"It would have been as well, perhaps," she said, loftily, "if Mrs. Jim Holmes had not been thwarted in her wish to go to Wandsworth fair; at least so Mrs. Quickly, an experienced woman, whom I am far from upholding in all things, is of opinion. *She* considers that *that* was the cause of her threatening to chuck the twins out of winder. I would not venture to give my own opinion on any account whatever. Men, you see, have sources of information which are denied to us."

My mother tried to keep her dignity. It would have helped her amazingly had she been able, but she could n't. She burst out laughing, and my father and I followed suit. My mother, in the feeble attempt to preserve her dignity, swept out of the forge, and left my father and me alone.

"Cut a nut through and you 'll come to the meat," said my father. "Let her talk long enough and you 'll find out her goodness. Well, here 's the forge fire out for good and all, and you and me as rich as marquises. This is the last night that you and me will sit together on the forge, old man. We have got the wealth of gentlefolks. I shall never get their manners, but you may. Fetch a candle and read me this here letter. It 's from Jack Martin, who is making his fortune on the Sidney side, with the gold. He seems to have repented of his treatment of me, but not of his bad writing. Read it out."

I saw that his fancy was to sit in the shop that night for the last time, and I fetched a candle and read the letter out. I hated Jack Martin. I thought him a worthless, selfish man; but my father's goodness had reflected itself on him; and he was conscious of the injury he had once done my father, and wished to atone for it.

It was dated from Canadian Gully, Ballarat. He had cleared three thousand pounds there, and earnestly pressed us to come. He entered into details; and his letter was so far important that it was the first reliable intelligence which we had had from the Port Philip gold-fields; and, as a matter of curiosity, the next time I wrote to Erne Hillyar, I sent it to him.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

ERNE GOES ON HIS ADVENTURES.

ABOUT a fortnight after this the most astonishing accounts from Bendigo appeared in both the *Sentinel* and the *Mohawk*. Three tons of gold had been taken down to Melbourne by the fortnightly escort, and two tons remained in camp for want of carriage.* But this, according to the *Mohawk*, was nothing at all to Lake Omeo, in the Australian Alps. In an article in which Malachi's collar was duly thrown in the teeth of the low-browed Saxon, the gold-fields of Lake Omeo were allowed to surpass the auriferous deposits of the Wicklow mountains, in their palmy times, before trade was paralyzed, and enterprise was checked, by the arrival of the beastly Dutchman. And really the most astonishing reports of this place seemed to have reached Melbourne from various quarters. The black sand, containing small emeralds and rubies, would yield sixty per cent of pure tin: it was ten and twelve feet thick, and at the bottom of it, in the crannies of the rock, a pound weight of gold had been washed out of a panful. I was still thinking of these extraordinary accounts when Erne came slinging along the road and jumped off his horse at my side.

I thought he had come over to see the works, which were now progressing nobly, but he soon undeceived me.

"Well," he said; "I've done it!"

"Done what?"

"I've cut the bush. I'm sick of it. The place is unbearable since your cousin Samuel has given up coming there; he was the only person worth speaking to. I've read all the books. I'm sick of the smell of sheep; I'm sick of the sight of a saddle; I am, oh! so utterly sick of those long, gray plains. I am sick of being kissed by old Quickly behind the door when she's drunk: I should have had that cap of hers off her head and chucked it on the fire if I had staid much longer. And now Clayton is getting sulky at the goings on, as well he may; and so I have come off, and am going to Lake Omeo."

"Think before you do that, my dear Erne."

"I want adventure, excitement, movement of some kind. If I stayed there, moping about Emma much longer, I should go mad. I shall never forget her *there*. Come with me, old fellow. You are rich enough to do as you like now; come with me."

* Fact.

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I don't think I was ever more tempted in my life. It would have been such a glorious adventure, with him. It would have been the finest adventure we had ever had together; but I had to set my teeth, and say "No." There was some one expected, and I could n't leave my wife.

He was very much disappointed, but did not say another word. He was perfectly bent on going. I knew his romantic impulsiveness of old, and was aware that nothing would turn him.

Trevittick had listened to our conversation and had left us. Tom Williams very soon came up and joined us.

"My eye!" he said, "don't it make your mouth water. Take me with you, Mr. Erne. You and I were always favorites together. Come, let us go."

"Oh, do come, old fellow," said Erne. "Do let me have one face with me in this adventure that I know and like as well as yours. Oh, do come, and we will go through it all together to the end. Next to Jim here, I would have chosen you among all men to be my friend and brother in this quest. How glorious the life, the motion, the novelty, the crowds of strange faces will be! What will be the end of it? Where shall we find ourselves at last? Hurrah for the cool brisk South; and good-bye to these hot, melancholy forests. Give me your hand, my boy. We are vowed to one another henceforward.

> 'It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
> It may be we shall touch the happy isles,
> And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.'"

I cast a look of gratitude at Tom Williams. "But," I said, "what will Trevittick say?"

"Trevittick," growled that gentleman, behind me, "will say just what he told Tom Williams just now. That, if he sees that young gentleman go out alone, without one single friend, into the terrible scenes and places he will have to encounter, he never need n't trouble himself to speak to me no more: and so I tell him."

And so these two went together. The *Wainoora*, the steamer by which they went, sailed one summer morn at daybreak southward to Palmerston and Melbourne. His last words to me were, "Tell her that I am the same to her till death." I went up, on to the highest point of the Cape, high above the town, and watched the little steamer, steady and true in her course as a star, traversing the great purple rollers of the Indian Ocean, which broke on the coast under her lee in far-heard thunders. Her screw raised a little thread of foam in her wake, and her funnel left a haze of smoke aloft, which travelled with her, for the wind was fair. I watched her round Cape Windham, and then she was gone, and Erne was gone with her. I turned wearily,

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with a sigh, and looked northward. Nothing there but the old endless succession of melancholy forest capes, fringed with silver surf; aloft, lazily-floating clouds. They would have a fair passage.

"And so your sister has drove him to the diggings at last, has she?" said a voice behind me. "I guessed she would, all along. She has used him shameful. I would n't have cared if it had been only Bendigo, or Ballarat, or the Avoca; but he is going to Omeo; and Omeo and the Buckland are death to such as he. I hoped you kissed him when you said good-bye, for you 'll none of you see him any more. And a nice mess you 've made of it among you."

It was my cousin Samuel, who had crept up behind me. And I turned sternly on him, and asked him what he meant.

"What I say. That sister of yours, with her high-faluting balderdash, has driven that young man out of his mind. I am a poor fallen, wicked old man; but that Erne Hillyar is such a pure, simple, high-souled gentleman, that at times he has made me waver in my purpose, and feel inclined to do what I won't do unless that fellow pushes me too far. He wants brains, may be; so do you; but he is the first man I have met for twenty years who, knowing everything, has treated me as an equal. I never met such a fine lad in my life. He has quietly made me ashamed of my old habits, and is the first man who has given me hopes for the future. But he ain't good enough for your sister. And she has sent him south to die."

The sun was bright overhead, and the summer wind was whispering gently among the heathers and Hakeas around, and yet it seemed to grow dark, and the wind to get chill, as my cousin left me with these words. He passed slowly down the hill towards his estate, and, entering the wood behind his house, disappeared, and left me to my thoughts.

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CHAPTER LIX.

JAMES OXTON GOES OUT, AND WIDOW NORTH COMES IN.

James Oxton splashed and floundered through two more sessions after Erne's first arrival in the colony. Sometimes he was up to his knees, sometimes up to his middle; sometimes the enemy said that he was over his head, and that there was the finish and end of the man; body and bones, and high time too. But, no. On questions of great public utility, his personal prestige, combined with the good sense of the House, and possibly the putting to work of some parliamentary tactics, was still sufficient to carry him through, and James Oxton managed to follow each Opposition victory by a greater one of his own; and so, although sick of the business altogether, he held on manfully. He was loth to see the work of twenty years, as he thought, ruined.

At last the advanced party brought in a Land Bill of their own, and lost it by only three votes, including the Speaker. It became necessary for James Oxton to "go to the country." His Excellency, being a wise Excellency, and therefore unwilling to do what he had the power to do, if he chose, — to keep in a favorite minister and dear friend against the wishes of the colony, — complied with a heavy heart with James Oxton's request. He dissolved the Assembly, and sent James Oxton to the country. The country very properly sent him back again with eight votes less than he came with.

The question is much more easily understandable than the Schleswig-Holstein one, which has come by a rather queer solution, as, "There are more dogs than cats, and therefore the cats must all turn dogs at their peril." The question on which James Oxton came by what the *Mohawk* called his "downfall" was by no means of a European complexity. In fact, colonial politics are *not* difficult to master, for the simple reason that there are seldom more than two interests at work at the same time, and that those two interests do so jam, pound, and pummel one another, that, although logic, nay, sometimes, as in England at hot moments, even grammar, may suffer; yet those two interests between them, generally "ventilate" the question most thoroughly; and, to use a thoroughly *Mohawkian* catachresis, look over one another's cards, and see which way the cat is going to jump.

The great export of the country was wool. The foundation of its present prosperity was wool. To grow wool with success

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enormous tracts must be under the control of one single man. A wool-grower must have 30,000 acres, at least, under his sole command, and then on the best of country he could not safely venture on more than 9,000 sheep; for he might have his run swept by a fire any January night, and be forced to hurry his sheep down to the boiling-house. Now the small farmers, contemptuously called "cockatoos," were the fathers of fire, the inventors of scab, the seducers of bush-hands for hay-making and harvesting, the interlopers on the wool-growers' grass with their cattle and horses. James Oxton, a "squatter," a wool-grower among wool-growers, had argued thus, and had unworthily blinded himself so far as to legislate for his own class.

In order to prevent the acquisition of land by the laboring classes, he had rigorously resisted every attempt to alter the old land laws. The upset price was one pound an acre, payable at once. Any one could demand and get a special survey of not less than 5,000 acres at that price without competition, by which mischievous regulation large tracts of the very best land were in the hands of great capitalists. His own estate, "The Bend," was one of these special surveys, and had increased in value from £5,000 to £30,000. And lastly, the quantity of land thrown into the market was exceedingly limited. In this way, using the money raised by the land sales to assist emigrants, he was creating a lower class, and depressing the price of labor by denying them land.

The Radicals had brought in a bill demanding the right of selection of lots as small as eighty acres, and three years' credit in paying for it. This was too liberal, and, in spite of the furious war-whoops of Mr. O'Callaghan, was rejected, Government having a majority of three.

Had James Oxton, even after the loss of eight votes by the dissolution, brought in a moderate measure of his own, all would have gone well. But, he refusing to move in the matter at all, and there being undoubtedly a strong necessity to attend to the cry of "unlock the lands," the Radicals brought in their bill, a more moderate one than the last. The House accepted it by a majority of eleven against the Government, and James Oxton, the moment after the division, announced his resignation amidst the most profound silence.

Though the *Mohawk* said next morning that the brazen head of James Oxton had been found, like that of Lord Bacon, to have feet of clay, and that when it had done rolling in the dust the oppression of seventeen years was revenged at last; yet still, now it was done, every one was a little bit frightened. The Secretary was so good, and big, and so calm, and had governed the colony so well. And Mr. O'Ryan had formerly made no secret of his

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intentions. People remembered the programme which he had offered the country five years before, when power had been beyond his grasp; he had concealed his wicked principles lately, but that was his artfulness. *They* remembered manhood suffrage and separation from the mother-country. Moderate people began to think they had got into a scrape; but there was Mr. O'Ryan at Government House, and the list would be out that evening.

And, when the list did come out, things did not look much better. There was not an English or a Scotch name in it. The Radical party was officered almost entirely by Irishmen, and the Irishmen had taken care of themselves to the exclusion of the other two nations. Ministers in the House:—O'Ryan, Secretary; Murphy, Education; Moriarty, Trade; and so on. And where was Dempsey? Not in the list at all, but concocting some malignant conspiracy in the background; which was even more dreadful to imaginative people than if the destinies of the community had been handed over altogether to the tender mercies of that red-handed rebel. And the inferior appointments too! Rory O'More, Barney Brallagan, and so on! And did anybody ever hear of such a measure as appointing old Lesbia Burke Postmaster General?

"O'Ryan must suddenly have gone mad, my dear Mr. Burton," said the pretty and clever little widow, Mrs. North, to our old friend Joe, as they sat on a sofa, side by side, reading the lists together, with their heads very nearly touching.

Joe, now the prosperous and wealthy Mr. Burton, had been elected for North Palmerston at the last election, and the night before had spoken for the first time. He had spoken so wisely and so well as to command the greatest attention and respect. He had counselled moderation on both sides, and the style of his speech pointed him out at once as a man of the very highest class.

The place where they were sitting was Mrs. Oxton's drawing-room; the time twilight. Emma and Mrs. Oxton had gone to the opera, and the Secretary was shouting at play with his boy at the other end of the garden. They were alone.

"O'Ryan must suddenly have gone mad, my dear Mr. Burton."

"Not the least, my dear madam. He only wanted to avoid the fate of Actæon. He would have been torn to pieces by his following, if he had n't placed every one possible. You see Dempsey has refused office, to leave one more place vacant, and satisfy one more claimant; and, as it is, there must be two or three dozen unsatisfied. He has done the best he can."

"He is a man of great ability," said the widow.

"A first-rate man, if he had some one to keep him quiet, to

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let him talk and prevent his going too far in action; the second man in the colony."

"I know who promises to be the third," said the widow, very quietly.

Joe blushed and laughed.

"What a really beautiful face he has," said the widow to herself. "What a pity it is about his poor dear back."

"You spoke so splendidly last night," she went on. "If you could only have heard what Mr. Oxton said!"

"I would sooner hear what *you* said."

"It was so noble of you to acknowledge that you had modified your opinions, and that there were many things on which you differed from the Secretary, and then to make that *résumé* of his services to the colony; such a glorious panegyric! I clasped my hands together with excitement as you went on."

"I live with one object," said Joe, "and you are worthy to know of it; you are worthy to share my secret. I dread the effects of faction on this colony. This colony must be governed by a great coalition between James Oxton and Phelim O'Ryan, and I am the man to bring that about."

The widow *thought*, "Well, you have a tolerable amount of assurance, if that is any recommendation. Is there anything else you would like?" But she *said* rapturously, "What a magnificent and statesmanlike idea. Oh, the day you bring about that result, I will retire to my *boudoir* and weep for joy!"

"Do *you* wish me success?" exclaimed Joe, seizing her hand in his absence of mind. "Oh, if ——"

"Hullo! you people," exclaimed the Secretary, who came up at this moment, "Is that the *Sentinel*? Is the list out? Let us look."

Both the widow and Joe got excessively red, but perhaps the Secretary did n't notice it. At all events he did not say anything.

"Only three tolerable people among the lot. Old Lesbia Burke is the best man among them, when all is said and done!"

"But what an absurd thing to do; to appoint a woman," bridled the widow. "It is so, — so improper."

"It 's rather a cool precedent, certainly; but, as for Lesbia, the dear old girl would command a frigate, or take a regiment into action, if you gave her a month's training."

"Well, she is a kind body, and I wish her well," said the good-natured little widow. Every one had a kind word for Miss Burke.

"Shall you think me a brute," said the Secretary, "if I leave

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you here with Burton, and step into town to the club and hear the news? I ought to show to-day, or they will think I am crying."

"Oh, do go, my dear creature. Don't, for heaven's sake, let them think you feel it. Mr. Burton and I will sit here and play *euchre*, and abuse the new Ministers. We are getting very fond of one another." And so the Secretary went.

CHAPTER LX.

TOO LATE! TOO LATE!

THE widow and Joe had some half-hour's flirtation before the Secretary returned. He had been much less time than they expected, and looked very grave. "Burton," he said, "I want to speak to you."

Joe went into another room with him. "I have heard grave news, I am sorry to say," continued he, "which affects a mutual friend of ours, and, as I have long suspected, a very dear one of your sister's. The Melbourne papers have just come in; read this."

Joe with dismay read the following:—

"The unfortunate Omeo business is assuming very tragical proportions, and Government will have to take immediate measures to see if any of the poor fellows are still, by any possibility, alive. We said, last week, that provisions were at famine prices, and utterly deficient in quantity; since then, the miserable diggers have taken the only measure left open to them. They have fled, most of them, towards the Ovens, 160 miles, through a nearly unknown and quite uninhabited country, without provisions. Such troopers as have been sent out to seek for them have come back with the most terrible stories. Trooper O'Reilly found no less than eight dead together on the Milta Milta, in one place. One thing is perfectly certain: two hundred famine-stricken wretches have left the Omeo, and only nine have reached Beechworth by Snake Valley; while eleven have turned up at the Nine Mile Creek on the Sydney Road. In this most lamentable and unhappy business, we can blame no one. There was gold there, for Trooper O'Reilly took 130 ounces from the bodies of the unfortunates, — which bodies, after securing such papers as would lead to their identification, he had to leave to the tender mercies of the eagle-hawks and wild dogs,

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and all the other nameless horrors of which it appals us to think. To the relatives of those men who are known to have left the lake westwardly, and whose names we give here, we would say, 'If those you love are not among the twenty men who have come back, give up hope. We are kind, while we seem cruel. Give up hope. Those you love are at rest by now.'"

Joe looked up with a scared face, for neither Erne's name nor Tom Williams's name was in the list. He read them through once more in the wild hope that they were there, and he had missed them; once more to feel to the full the realization of the agony he felt at their absence. We must have a fruition of pain as of pleasure, or we gain no relief. When your child died, sir, why did you go and look into the coffin?

"I am guilty of this man's blood," he said. "I stand here before you, as the murderer of Erne Hillyar, in the sight of God."

"My good fellow," said the Secretary, "don't be rhetorical. Don't use that inflated style of speech, which may be useful enough in the House; in common life it's a bad habit. What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean every word I say. I wish your taunt was true, but it is not. I know now that my sister Emma loved him, and would have married him, but that she refused to leave me, because my hideous infirmity would render domestic life, — I mean married domestic life, — an impossibility. She devoted herself to me, and refused him. And he, caring nothing for life, has gone to that miserable God-forgotten desert, and has died there. I saw her doing all this, and in my wretched selfishness let her do it, and said not one word. Call me coward, knave, selfish villain, what you will, but don't taunt me with rhetorical flourishes. I am Erne Hillyar's murderer."

The Secretary looked exceedingly grave. Seventeen years, passed partly in money-making, and partly in official life, had not deadened the sentimental part of him one bit; he still hated to inflict pain; but he had learned to say a hard word, when he thought that word was deserved, and when it did not interfere with any political combination. The sentimental third of his soul was enlisted on Emma's side most entirely since Joe's explanation; he bore very hard on Joe, and was angry with him.

"You have been much to blame," he said, and would have gone on, but there was a crackling of wheels on the gravel, and he paused. "Keep it from her," he said hurriedly. "This may not be true. Keep the papers from her. They are coming. If it is true, let her hear it from my wife."

They went quickly into the next room to join Mrs. North, and

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immediately after Mrs. Oxton and Emma came in. Both were changed since we made their acquaintance a few years ago. Mrs. Oxton had faded rapidly, like most Australian beauties, and there was nothing left of the once splendid *ensemble* but the eyes and the teeth; they were as brilliant as ever; but her complexion was faded into a sickly yellow, and her beauty had to take its chance without any assistance from color, which was a hard trial for it, to which it had somewhat succumbed. Still, she had gained a weary and altogether loveable expression, which was, perhaps, more charming than her old splendid beauty. Emma also was very much changed.

She had always been what some call "young of her age." She had been a long while in developing, but now she had developed into a most magnificent woman. The old, soft, and childish roundness of her face was gone, and out of it there had come, as it were, the ideal of the soul within, — gentle, patient, — of a soul that had suffered, and would endure. Her look was one of continual and perfect repose; and yet, now that the face was more defined, those who knew her best could see how clearly and decisively the mouth and chin were cut; one could see now how it was that she could not only endure, but act.

She was tall, but not so tall as her mother. Her carriage was very easy and graceful, though very deliberate.

During her residence in Palmerston she had taken care to watch the best people, and was quite-clever enough to copy their manners without caricaturing them, which is being very clever indeed. This evening she was dressed in white crape, with a scarlet opera-cloak; her wreath was of dark red Kennedya, and she had a considerable number of diamonds on her bosom, though no other jewels whatever. Altogether she was a most imperial-looking person, and deserved certainly what she had had that night, — the attention of the whole theatre.

"I am so sorry you did not go with us, Mrs. North," she said in her quiet old voice, not altered one bit. "Catherine Hayes has been singing more divinely than ever. My dear brother, you have lost something. Will you come home now?"

"I cannot let you go till you have had supper, my love," put in Mrs. Oxton; and Emma willingly assented, and talked pleasantly about the opera, until they came into the light of the dining-room. After she had seen Joe's face she was quite silent.

They drove home, and the instant they were alone in their house she spoke. "My own brother, I have not spelt at your face for so many years without being able to read it; but there is a look in it to-night which I have never seen there before. Something terrible has happened."

Joe remained silent.

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"Is Erne dead?"

Joe tried to speak, but only burst into tears.

"I can bear it, dear, if you tell me quickly, — at least, I think I can bear it, or I will try, God help me! Only tell me quickly."

"There is no certainty. There is a list published, and his name is not there. That is all."

"Have you got the paper?"

"Yes."

"I must see it, or I shall die. I must know the worst, or I shall die. I must see that paper."

Joseph was forced to give it to her, and she read it quickly through. Then she sat down on a chair, and began rocking her body to and fro. Once, after a long time, she turned a face on Joseph which frightened him, and said, "Eagle-hawks and wild dogs," but she resumed her rocking to and fro once more. At last she said, "Go to bed, dear, and leave me alone with God." And to bed he went; and, as he saw her last, she was still sitting there, with her bouquet and her fan in her lap, and the diamonds on her bosom flashing to and fro before the fire, but tearless and silent.

She in her white crape and diamonds, and Erne lying solitary in the bush, with the eagle-hawks and wild dogs riving and tearing at his corpse. It had come to this, then!

Why had Joe brought away the old sampler he had found in the great room at Chelsea, the sampler of the poor Hillyar girl, and hung it up over the fireplace in the drawing-room? What strange, unconscious cruelty! In her solitary, agonized working to and fro on that miserable night, never impatient or wild, but ah! so weary; that old sampler was before her, and her tearless eyes kept fixing themselves upon it, till the words, at first mere shreds of faded worsted, began to have a meaning for her which they never had before. That poor crippled Hillyar girl, she thought, had stitched those words on the canvas two hundred years agone, that they might hang before her on this terrible night, — before her who might have borne the dear name of Hillyar, but who had driven her kinsman to his death by her obstinacy; hung there by her crippled brother, for whose sake she had refused this gallant young Hillyar, who had wooed her so faithfully and so truly.

"Why were the Hillyars and the Burtons ever allowed to meet," she asked herself, "if nothing but misery is to come of their meeting? He said once, when we were children, that our house was an unlucky one to the Hillyars. He spoke truth, dear saint. Let me go to him, — let me go to him!"

So her diamonds went flashing to and fro before the fire, till the fire grew dim, till the ashes grew dead and cold, and the

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immediately after Mrs. Oxton ...der the fender to seek for the changed since we made the ...es, found them burnt up and gone, Oxton had faded rapidl ...rannies in the brick-work, to wait for was nothing left of ... the teeth; they wer ...ew chill she sat, with her diamonds, and faded into a sickl ...quet; with the old sampler over the chimney- without any as ...ading it aloud, — to which it h ...

"Weep not, sweet friends, my early doom,
Lay not fresh flowers upon my tomb;
But elder sour and briony,
And yew-bough broken from the tree."

weary and more cha very m

She ...me go to him! Dead, — alone in the bush, with the had ...awks and wild dogs! Let me go to him!" int r

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CHAPTER LXI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

All this time there was a Sir George Hillyar somewhere. But where? That is a question which will never be answered with any accuracy, even were it worth answering. What an utterly dissipated and utterly desperate man does with himself in London I do not know; at least, I am unacquainted with the details, and, even were I not, I should hesitate to write them down. No decent house would allow my book to lie on the drawing-room table if I dared put in a tale what one reads every day in the police-reports of the newspapers.

One thing Mr. Compton found out very easily: all his letters bore the London post-mark. Mr. Compton could not make it out. Why did he not come home? Why did he not show? Was he a defaulter, or had he made another engagement, and did n't dare to face his wife? The old man suspected the latter was the case, and there is every reason to believe that he was right.

Reuben saw him sometimes; but he never told any one. Their appointments were always made at Chelsea. Reuben found that Sir George's practice of creeping into the old house had become habitual, and he taxed him with it; and so by degrees he discovered this, — that Sir George had discovered that this was one of Samuel Burton's former haunts, and that he had conceived an idea that he would somehow or another return there. This notion, originally well founded, seemed to have grown into a craze

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unhappy man, from certain words which occasionally . Reuben came to the conclusion that he waited a view to murdering him, should he appear. He there- his tongue on the fact, so well known to him, that Sam- arton was safe in Australia, — the more, as Sir George er permitted him on any account whatever to share his vigil.

Enough about Sir George Hillyar for the present. I am almost sorry I ever undertook to tell such a story as the history of his life. I suppose that, even in a novel, telling the bare and honest truth must do good somehow; but at times the task felt very loathsome. I had some faint pleasure in writing about the miserable man as long as there was some element of hope in his history; but I sicken at the task now. Knowing the man and his history, I knew what my task would be from the beginning. I undertook it, and must go on with it. The only liberties I have taken with fact have been to elevate his rank somewhat, and to dwell with an eager kindness on such better points as I saw in him. But writing the life of a thoroughly ill-conditioned man, from first to last, is weary work.

But his story sets one thinking, — thinking on the old, old subject of how far a man's character is influenced by education; which is *rather* a wide one. Suppose George Hillyar had been sent to Laleham instead of to Mr. Easy's, would the Doctor have done anything with him?

I declare, *à propos des bottes*, if you will, that there is a certain sort of boy with a nature so low, so sensual, so selfish, so surrounded with a case-hardened shell of impenetrable blockishness, that if you try to pierce this armor of his, and draw one drop f noble blood from the body which one supposes must exist within, you lose your temper and your time, and get frantic in the attempt. I don't say that these boys all go to the bad, but in an educational point of view they are very aggravating. If you miss them from the Sunday-school and want to see anything more of them, you will find them in Feltham Reformatory: among the upper classes the future of these boys is sometimes very different. "Now this vice's dagger has become a squire. Now he hath land and beeves."

I do not say that George Hillyar had been one of the lowest of that kind of boys; that he was not makes the only interest in his history. But we have nearly done with him. It will be a somewhat pleasanter task to follow once more the fortunes of his quaint little wife, and see what an extraordinary prank she took it into her head to play, and to what odd consequences that prank led.

As soon as the summer came on, and the gardeners had filled the great bare parterres all round the house with geraniums,

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calceolarias, lobelias, and what not, then Gerty took revenge for her winter's imprisonment, and was abroad in the garden and the woods, or on the lake, nearly all day. About this time also she began Baby's education, and had lessons every morning for about five or six minutes. At this time also Mrs. Oxton began to notice to her husband that Gerty's letters were getting uncommonly silly.

"Let me look at one," said the Secretary, from his easy-chair.

When he read it his brow grew clouded. "She never was so silly as this before, was she, my love?"

"Never. And why this long silence about George? He is neglecting her. I wish she was here."

"So do I, by Jove! But she seems pretty happy, too. I can't make it out."

Old Sir George had got the works of that great clock called Stanlake into such perfect order that, once wind it up, and it would go till the works wore out. The servants were so old and so perfectly drilled that really Gerty had but little to do. Her rambles never extended beyond the estate, but were always made with immense energy, for some very trivial object. At first it was the cowslips, and then Reuben taught the boy the art of birds'-nesting, and the boy taught his mother; and so nothing would suit her but she must string eggs. However, as the summer went on, she got far less flighty. And the Secretary and his wife noticed the change in her letters, and were more easy about her.

The next winter passed in the same total seclusion as the last. Mr. Compton saw a little change for the worse in her towards the end of it. He now gathered from her conversation that she had somehow got the impression that George was gone away with Mrs. Nalder. He elicited this one day after that affectionate woman had, hearing for the first time Gerty was alone, come raging over to see her. Gerty told him that she thought it rather bold on the part of that brazen-faced creature to come and ring at the door in a brougham, and ask if she was dead, after taking away her husband from her. She did not seem angry or jealous in the least. Mr. Compton did not know, as we do, that her suspicions of Mrs. Nalder were only the product of a weak brain in a morbid state: if he had, he would have been more disturbed. But, assuming the accusation to be true, he did not half like the quiet way in which she took it. "She will become silly, if she don't mind," he said.

The summer went on, and Gerty went on in the same manner as she had done in the last. It happened that on the 17th of August Mr. Compton went and stayed with her at Stanlake, and settled a little business, to which she seemed singularly inatten-

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tive. Nay, she seemed incapable of attention. She talked to him about a book she had taken a great fancy to, "White's History of Selborne," which Reuben had introduced to the boy, and the boy to his mother; indeed, all her new impressions now came through her boy. She told him about the migration of the swallows, — how that the swifts all went to a day, were all gone by the 20th of August. Some said they went south; but some said they took their young and went under water with them, to wait till the cold, cruel winter was over, and the sun shone out once more.

This conversation made Mr. Compton very anxious. He thought she was getting very flighty, and wondered how it would end. He thought her eye was unsettled. On the evening of the 21st of August the Stanlake butler came to him, called him out from dinner, and told him that her ladyship and the young gentleman had been missing for twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER LXII.

GERTY'S ANABASIS.

THE first thing Mr. Compton did, on hearing of Lady Hillyar's disappearance, was to take a cab and dash off to the Nalders' in Grosvenor Place, in the wild hope that Mrs. Nalder *might* know something about Sir George Hillyar's whereabouts, and that she might enable him to communicate personally with him. The house was blazing with lights, and the carriages were flashing rapidly up to the door; but kind Nalder came down to him. Seeing no one but a gentle and mild-looking old gentleman before him, he ventured to talk his native language, which he would not have ventured to do for his life in his own drawing-room, and explained to Mr. Compton that Mrs. N. had got on a tarnation tall hop, — a regular Old Tar River breakdown; and, seeing Mr. Compton was in full dress, he hoped his business would keep, and that he would jine 'em and shake a toe. Having relieved his heart by so much of the dear old prairie talk, and seeing Mr. Compton was anxious and distressed, he began to speak in diplomatic American, — absolutely perfect English, slightly Frenchified in style, and spoken a little through the nose; English which, under the present presidency, seems to be going out of fashion, as Webster's English gives way to Lincoln's, and M'Clellan's to Grant's.

He was very much distressed at what Mr. Compton told him.

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Lady Hillyar's jealousy against Mrs. Nalder, to which he had so delicately alluded, was an old source of distress to him and his wife. As for their having any knowledge whatever of Sir George Hillyar's whereabouts, they had actually none at all; and, if he might speak without giving offence, had no wish for any.

"As for your suspicion of her having drowned herself, my dear sir," Nalder continued, "I would banish that from my mind utterly. What earthly reason can she have for such a proceeding? Pooh, pooh, my dear sir, — if you will allow me to speak so to a man so much older than myself, — you are fanciful. Because a woman talks about swallows going under water, is she, therefore, necessarily to follow the precedent herself?"

Mr. Compton stood silent for half a minute; before he had time to speak, Mr. Nalder rammed both his hands into the bottom of his breeches' pocket, and said, in that loud, snarling whine which it has pleased the Americans to adopt in moments of emergency, —

"I 'll tell you whawt, lawyer: I 'll bet New York against New Orleans, or Chicago against Kingston, that she has bolted to Australey, back to her sister."

So she had. But, first of all, Mr. Compton insisted on believing that she had drowned herself, — in consequence of that unlucky remark of hers about the swallows. Next, he insisted that she could never have started for Australia without telling him, which was equally nonsensical. Thirdly, he advanced the theory that she had n't got any money, quite forgetting that George had allowed her a privy purse of £400, of which she probably had n't spent £100. And lastly, just when he had determined to make strict inquiries about the London Docks, Gerty was quietly arranging her cabin on board the *Baroda* at Southampton.

She would not face another winter; she had wit left to see that her wit was going, and that it would be wiser to put herself under the protection of the Oxtons. She was also uncertain of her position. She could not tell whether any of them would prevent her, or whether they had the right; so she determined to have no argument about the matter. One evening after dark, taking no more with her than she could carry, she managed, sometimes, carrying Baby and sometimes letting him walk, to get across country to a station on the main line of the South Western, where she was not known, in time for the last train, and by it went on straight to Southampton. The next morning she quietly bought her luggage, and moved to another hotel to avoid attention. In a week the good ship went thundering out between the Shingles and the Needles; and, when the great chalk wall was passed, and Alum Bay was only a wonderful recollection, Gerty felt that she was free.

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She had taken passage only two days before the ship sailed, and had sense enough to use her own name, considering that fewer liberties would be taken with Lady Hillyar than with Mrs. Hillyar. She sat next the captain at dinner, and seldom spoke to any one else. Now she had got among other people once more, she found how nervous, timid, and hesitating these two years of seclusion had made her. She was afraid to speak for fear of saying some unutterable nonsense.

At Alexandria some more Australians joined them, making the whole number up to nine; but they were lost among the Indians. And such as did know anything of her, only said that old Neville's daughter was giving herself airs since she had married a title; and so, after the Australians got into their own steamer at Point de Galle, and were alone together, none of them troubled themselves about the little fine lady of Cooksland.

Gerty had been accustomed to consider Melbourne a low sort of place, where the *bourgeoisie* were admitted into society, and you never knew whom you might meet; but when, between Sandridge and Emerald Hill, she came on the first clump of gum-trees, with bracken fern growing beneath them, she loved it, and would love it forever. It might be a low, upstart place, fifty years younger than Sydney, full of all sorts of people, nurse of all sorts of dangerous opinions; but it was Australia still. Wapping is not a nice place, — nay, it is a very nasty place indeed; but one will love it because it is sometimes the first place that one puts one's foot on in England. It was not very difficult for Gerty to fall in love with dear old Melbourne, in spite of her having been trained by that veritable old squatter, her father, to consider it the City of Satan.

The passenger-list in the *Argus* announced the arrival of Lady Hillyar, and, moreover, that she was at the "Prince of Wales." Lady H—— drove over in a few days from Toorak to call on her, but she was gone. She had dismissed her maid, and hired an open car as far as Albury, leaving most of her luggage behind.

Lady H—— thought it very strange that Lady Hillyar had not gone by steamer to Sydney, and from thence, by New Caledonia, New Zealand, Queensland, (then called Moreton Bay,) New Hungary, New United Italy, New Poland, New Tartary, New Wapping, and New Beloochistan, on to Cooksland; but, supposing that Lady Hillyar was tired of the sea, she was not so much surprised after all at her going overland; for the distance between Albury and Cooksland was not so very great. Only a very small strip of New South Wales interposed.

Every school-boy knows, or, according to the latest critical

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formula, would be flogged for not knowing, that Albury is on the river Murray, and is the last town in the republic of Victoria, and that across the river you come into New South Wales. But every school-boy does not know, inasmuch as no one but myself is in possession of the fact, that by holding to a native path through the bush from that place, in a direction north-eastern by south, you reach the frontier of Cooksland, by stout walking, within three days. Since the two-and-sixpenny duty on gold, this track has been much used by smugglers; and, if the Victorian Government will take advice, they will look to the matter. In the good time coming, when the Australian Federation set up on their own account, and, sickened with prosperity, feel the necessity of a little fighting, they need not despair of finding a *casus belli* among themselves. The difference of inter-colonial tariffs will make as handsome a cause for a very pretty squabble as the Devil himself could desire. "General Peter Lalor crossed the Murry yesterday, and attacked the enemy's earthworks at Three Mile Creek. He was forced to retire with a loss of 400 men. The Sydney-siders' loss is considered by him to have been far greater." How pretty that will read! But we have read some queerer things than that lately from America.

But Gerty? She discharged her car at Albury, paying the man forty-five pounds. She had made her resolution; she had determined to *walk* across into Cooksland.

The Bush had no more terrors for her than Regent Street has for you. If she met a Bush hand, and her honor was in question, why she had provided herself with a revolver. It was mentioned months ago that one of the two great recollections of her life was first being taken to a ball at Sydney; and another was hinted at only, as we intended to reserve it for this place. One summer's day, when she was a child, after she and Aggy had been gathering quantongs by the creek, her father, old Mr. Morton, Mr. Dawson, and young Clayton, had come suddenly home, said something which frightened their mother out of her wits, had barricaded the door, and loaded their guns. Soon after they began shooting at some men outside, and the men shot at them through the windows, and broke the claret jug on the side-board. She remembered that these men, the bush-rangers, had broken in the door, and that Mr. Dawson had shot down two of them, and killed another by bending his head back, and that her mother had kissed Mr. Dawson afterwards, — that she had been sorry for the poor men, as she was for the inhabitants of Jericho, who had not shot into any one's windows, or at least it was n't mentioned, — that her mother was very angry with her, and said that a girl who had n't gumption enough to drive a knife

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into a bush-ranger's heart would not have the courage to drive it into her own, and was unfit to live. Gerty had learnt from her mother how to defend her honor.

How quaint that old Australian life seems to one! High refinement in many cases, but the devil always at the door. Not, as in India, a sudden, furious, unexpected devil, tearing all to pieces; but a recognized devil, standing always ready. "This is the last of that seal of Lafitte, sir, and the blacks are crowding round and looking awkward." "*The Illustrated News* is come, sir, but no *Spectator* this mail, and Mike Howe is out again, sir, and has stuck up Dolloy's, and burnt one of the children, sir. Do you think he will take us next, or the Macdonalds?" Those are the sort of little mares'-tails you get at the outside edge of that vast cloud of English influence which has now overshadowed fully one-sixth of the human race. And, until you have been to the edge, you will find it difficult fully to appreciate the extreme meteoric disturbance which you will find there. Look at the case of a certain family the other day in Queensland, — refined, hospitable people, beloved by every one, — the young squire, sent over to Rugby, where he turned out champion cricketer. They all got suddenly, ruthlessly murdered by the blacks one summer's evening.

Were there any blacks on Gerty's track? Plenty. Was she alarmed about them? Not the least in the world. There were none but *tame* blacks on that line of country; there was not a wild black within a hundred miles, — they had all been tamed ever so long. And the process? Borrow Chief Justice Therry's book, and read pages 271 to 278, and see if you can sleep after it.

Gerty did not care for the blacks one halfpenny. She rather looked forward to meeting some of them, to have a good "patter" with them, and see if she had that extraordinary comical patois for which she was once famous, — the Romany of Australia, — the dialect used by the two races in communicating with one another; nearly all English, but which is made so wonderfully funny by the absence of all declension and conjugation in the native language, and which forces the adept to use only the first person singular (or rather the native substitute for it, "mine"), and the third; and confines him mostly to the present tense.* Gerty was anxious to see if she had forgotten her Blackfellow.

Starting from Albury, she came at once into Rabelais county, where she lay one night at the house of Count Raminagrobis,

* *English.* "I saw a large number of horses beside the creek." *Blackfellow.* "Mine make a light eighty-four (generally, I regret to say, adjective) horses along a creek." *English.* "I do not think it was he." *Blackfellow.* "Baal mine think it that one."

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an aged French squatter, who told her fortune in four different ways, each of which came different. She got into Hawthorne county next morning, and spent the night with Mrs. Prynne and her charming *espiègle* daughter from New England. After this she passed through the great Grevillia scrub, where she left part of her gown and her few remaining wits, and, crossing the river Roebuck, came into Cooksland, in Jones county, and passed the night at Blogg's station, on the Flour Bag Creek; delighted to find herself once more with more familiar and less queer people, in the land of her birth.

She determined to make for the Barkers' station, that being the nearest where she was known; and three glorious spring days she spent in getting there, — three days passed in introducing Baby to the flowers, the animals, and the birds. The third evening, just at dark, she stood on the summit of Cape Wilberforce, and could see the lights of the town below her on the other side of the Erskine. There was a large light about two miles to the left, — the light, in fact, of the new copper works; but between her and the river there was only one solitary light, about a mile below her, towards which she determined to make, to ask the way across the river; for she knew she must cross the river and pass right through the township before she could reach the Barkers, even if that were possible to-night.

So she picked her way down in the dark, carrying Baby pickapack, until she came to some rails, over which they got, and came into a thicket of wood, a very dark place undergrown with shrubs. They had lost the light now, but very soon came suddenly upon it again close to them; at which moment a large dog came out at them and began barking furiously.

"Don't be frightened, love," said Gerty to Baby; "it is only a sheep-dog; he won't hurt us." To the dog, — "*You 'll* catch it, sir. I 'll give it to you, sir, and so I tell you. How dare you? Come here, sir; do you hear, come here this instant, and don't let me hear another word out of your head."

The dog came wagging his tail, and Gerty took him by the scruff of his neck and slapped him. "If you are in earnest with them dear," she said, with that careful attention to the child's education which she had always shown, "you should have a tea-stick, and take them by the tail, raising their hind legs off the ground, so that they can't bite you, and lay on like old gooseberry. Now, dear, I will hold him; do you go into the hut, and say that Lady Hillyar is outside and wishes to be guided to Mr. Barker's. Come, that 's a man."

Baby was very valiant. Gerty saw him advance boldly to the door, which was ajar, push it open, and pass on into the well-lit room beyond.

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CHAPTER LXIII.

SAMUEL BURTON GETS A FRIGHT.

SAMUEL BURTON was prospering amazingly. In addition to the plunder which he had netted from his dexterous robberies at Stanlake, he had made a great hit just latterly. He had bought a lot of twenty acres, with frontage, on the Erskine, for £200, and now the Burnt Hut Copper Mining Company had, after a long wrangle, consented to pay him £2,300 for it, that they might build the terminus to their tramway thereon.

Yet he was far from being more easy in his mind than heretofore. Had any one told the miserable desperate hound, who had sneaked into George Hillyar's office so few years ago, and borrowed thirty pounds of him, that he would have risen to such a height of prosperity, he would have laughed at him. But here he was, not only comfortable for life, but holding over Sir George Hillyar a power worth thousands a year to him: and yet he was getting desperate and ferocious.

He was a most awful scoundrel. There could be no doubt of that. It may be true that there is an average amount of crime to be committed in a certain number of years, and therefore it don't much matter how it is done or who does it, as a contemporary wittily put it the other day; yet still, if you would carry Buckleism to this extreme length, you will find that the little efforts after good, and the better instincts of the very worst men, are very well worth careful examination.

Now this utter scoundrel, Burton, for instance, had his good instincts. The man was good-natured and fond of children. He was grateful and generous; and, what is more to the purpose just now, his devotion to his supposed son Reuben was a passion with him. Sir George Hillyar had used him and abused him for his own ends, but he had retained a kind of dog-like faithfulness towards that man, until he had stepped in between him and Reuben; and, now, moping in solitude, or worse than solitude, his old love for Sir George was rapidly giving way to ferocious hatred. He felt sure, and he was right, that no one but Sir George Hillyar, — who, as he knew, hated and distrusted him, — could have stepped in between honest, kindly Reuben and himself, and produced this estrangement.

His most affectionate appeals to Reuben had been left long unanswered, and now were only answered by letters shorter and

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colder time after time. Reuben had loved him once, and risked all for him; and the poor wretch, who had tried what *he* called religion, and had found that the lowest and wildest form of it enjoined a practice far, far beyond what was possible to him now, felt more and more every day, as his wasted life drew towards its close, the want of some one being who could care for him. Reuben would have cared for him, and tended him, and seen him kindly to the dark dreadful threshold, which, as he fully believed, was the threshold of everlasting torment. Hell, since his last feeble effort at reformation, he considered as certain; but there had been something left in this world; there had been Reuben's kind pleasant ministrations to the very end. Sir George, whom he had served so faithfully for good or evil, had stepped in, and taken this away.

In his lonely despair, he vowed a terrible vengeance. It was easy vowing; but how was he to execute it? A few months ago, he might, as he thought, have struck the blow, by placing the will in Erne's hands, just at the time when Erne had been so kind to him; but, partly from some lingering reluctance to ruin his old master, partly from natural indecision, and partly from a sneaking miser-like love of possessing unused power, he had hesitated. And now Erne was gone South to die; nay, rumors had come that he was dead; and what was his precious will worth then?

And there was another thing which terrified the poor wretch night and day. He was *afraid* of Sir George Hillyar, *physically* afraid. Give him a knife, and give any other man a cudgel, and he would face it out. In that case he had the courage of experience. But Sir George Hillyar was a bold man, the pupils of whose eyes would fix themselves steadily when he looked at you, and which pupils would suddenly dilate, just before the snarl and the blow came together, as the thunder snap and the lightning did, when the storm was directly overhead. And he was an unscrupulous man too; so, sometimes, Samuel Burton would wake in the night in a perspiration of fear, and think that he heard George Hillyar moving towards him in the dark to murder him.

He would not sleep alone. But he had no friend in Romilly. He was known for a convict, and, although they treated him with civility, nay, with more than civility, they would have none of him. Tim Reilly (the, I was going to say, horse-stealer, but won't,) would have nothing at all to do with him. Tim had, like his great compatriot, O'Connell, driven a vast number of coaches and four through, at all events, one Act of Parliament, — that against horse-stealing. Dan O'Connell had driven, or was prepared to drive, through the whole lot of them. He

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beat Tim O'Reilly in this respect, but Tim beat him in another; Tim always stole the horses before he got on the box. But Tim had never been convicted, and would not lower himself by consorting with Samuel Burton.

It was mentioned before in these pages that, when he first invaded Cooksland, old Barker found an old convict shepherd, with a view to confining the criminal contamination within one single hut. Samuel Burton now, for want of another, got this old man to come and live with him; and I need not say that, the longer he lived there, the more pleasant the old jail-slang became to him, and the more surely every spark of good in him got trampled out.

Still there were times, even now, when he would get ashamed of his life with this ribald old sinner, and think of the life he might lead with Reuben, as of something higher and purer, getting further and further from him every day.

One night they were sitting before the fire talking together. — Bah! let us go to Tennyson, —

"Fear not thou to loose thy tongue,
Let thy hoary fancies free;
What is loathsome to the young,
Savors well to thee and me.

"Chant me now some wicked stave,
Till thy drooping spirits rise,
And the glowworm of the grave
Glimmer in thy rheumy eyes."

Let us leave the conversation of two depraved old men alone. They were talking on together, each chuckle getting more fiendish than the last one, when the elder rose up and started back, with a frightful and savage oath; and Samuel Burton staggered trembling against the wall, and leant there, with his face worked into an abject expression of the extremest terror.

For there stood between them a most beautiful child, with light waving hair like an angel's, dressed all in white. It stood full in the fire-light, and its little hands were spread towards the blazing logs, as if in prayer.

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CHAPTER LXIV.

SAMUEL BURTON'S RESOLUTION.

THEN the man who had savagely cursed this beautiful and holy apparition as something godlike, and therefore utterly abhorrent to his nature, — this man relapsed into moody, defiant silence; but the man who had only trembled before it, the man who could still feel terrified and abashed at the contrast between his own black soul and the sacred purity of the child before him, — this man gained courage to advance towards it, and to speak tenderly and kindly to it.

Little George had knelt before the fire, and was eagerly warming his hands, for the night was chill. Still the fancy held with Samuel Burton that the child was kneeling before a blazing altar, and praying for him.

"My dear," he said, "have you lost your way in the wood, and shall I take you home?"

"Mamma lost her way, and when the dog came out she beat it. Not so hard as Reuben beats the setters though, for it did not cry out."

"Who is mamma, dear, and where is she?"

"I am cold, and I think I have wet my right foot in the wood. I want to warm my hands, and then I will remember the message and go back to her. She won't mind waiting while I warm my hands."

"Who is mamma, dear? And you can remember the message while you warm your hands," said Samuel, with increasing interest.

"Oh, yes," said Baby, "I can remember. Mamma is Lady Hillyar. She is outside now, and she wants some one to take her up to Mr. Barker's."

"My dear," said Samuel Burton, eagerly kneeling beside the child, "do you know Reuben?"

"You silly man," laughed Baby; "of course I do."

"Where is Reuben, dear?"

"At Stanlake, of course. I must go back to mamma."

"One word, dearest. Where is papa?"

"Papa is in Italy."

"Does papa never come to Stanlake? Does papa never see Reuben?"

"No, never. He never comes to Stanlake. I must go to mamma, please; take me to mamma."

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Samuel had heard enough. He seized a candle, and rushed out of the hut, exclaiming aloud, with suddenly assumed excitement, —

"Good heavens! Her ladyship alone in the bush, and the dew falling. Madam! My lady! For God's sake, answer! Where is your ladyship? Oh dear, dear me!"

"Here I am," replied Gerty complacently, coming out of the darkness with the sheep-dog leaping upon her; "I was wondering what was keeping the dear child so long."

"Dear! dear! your ladyship will have caught your death of cold. Pray walk in to the fire. Allow me as an old bushman to caution your ladyship against these October dews; though indeed, my lady, you should know the climate as well as I. I suppose Sir George has gone on to Mr. Barker's."

"Sir George is in Europe," answered Gerty. "But I wish you would take me up to Mr. Barker's, for I am tired, and they will be gone to bed. Hallo!" she continued, turning to the older convict, "why there's old Ben! I thought you were shepherding for Mr. Barker. I ain't going to have *your* company up there, you know, and so I don't deceive you."

The old wretch gave a grin and growl, but Gerty turned away from him with calm contempt.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said Samuel, "but it is a good five miles to the station, and it would be almost too much for you to-night."

"I ain't going to stop here, you know," said Gerty. "Likely indeed!"

"But could not your ladyship go to the Burtons' for to-night? It is close by."

"You don't mean to tell me that they are here still. Why I thought they had found a mine and gone."

"They are living within two hundred yards, my lady. Only across the water. Will you follow me?"

She went out after him into the night air, and felt it strike deadly chill upon her. She thought of what Samuel had said about the heavy October dews, and thought she must have caught cold. She could scarcely follow Samuel, though he walked close before her. Baby had hold of her skirts, but she felt about in the darkness till she got his hand, and said: "It is only two hundred yards, dear, and we shall be among the Burtons. Thank God, it did not happen sooner."

They crossed a wooden bridge, and came into the street of the town, the lights of which were dim in Gerty's failing eyes. Somehow, immediately after, she was in a pretty drawing-room, and a group of people, who had hurriedly risen, were pressing towards her.

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But she only saw Emma Burton, and she cried out to her, "Emma, dear, I am going to be ill; take care of Baby. Then there came over her in one moment a terrible recollection of her lone, solitary journey; a sudden appreciation of the enormous task she had so heedlessly undertaken; then one happy moment, in which she was conscious that she was safe; and then the brave, silly little woman, overdone in body and mind, became comfortably insensible, and was borne in a kind of triumph to bed by Mrs. Burton and Emma, and, waking up, found that she had caught a violent rheumatic cold, lost one of her shoes, and all capacity for thinking consecutively and reasonably.

She had trusted her old friend the Bush a little too far this time. As she very sensibly said, she was glad it did not happen before.

Samuel Burton went back to his cottage very fast. When he got back he found old Ben still smoking over the fire, who seemed inclined to resume the conversation where it was broken off; but Samuel told him savagely to shut up, and sat over the fire with his head buried in his hands.

So Reuben was alone at Stanlake. Now or never was his time. He determined to go to England to see Reuben. Reuben's mind had been poisoned against him by some one; perhaps by old Morton, the keeper. He would find Reuben, and make his story good to him, and would induce Reuben to live with him, and would work to make his fortune. He thought that he had possibly been unjustly suspicious of Sir George Hillyar. He was determined that Sir George Hillyar should have fair play. He would not meddle with Sir George in any way.

Meanwhile, with regard to Samuel Burton. If the child, when stretching out its hands towards the burning logs, had really been praying for mercy for his father, he could hardly have done more to soften the heart of the man who held such terrible power over both of them. If he could only get Reuben, he would not behave vindictively towards him. Nay, supposing Erne to be really dead, what power had he? And this is remarkable. He could not decide whether Erne was dead or alive; for at one time he thought it impossible that he could have survived, which was perfectly reasonable, and, at another, his soul was filled with a superstitious, unreasonable belief that he was alive, and would return. He had divorced himself by instinct and practice from truth so long that he was utterly unable to examine evidence, and decide on probabilities. But he found that, whenever he believed Erne to be alive, his rancor against Sir George Hillyar increased, and, when he believed him dead, his feeling towards his old master grew more tender. As his intellect told him that his power of treating with his enemy grew less, so his heart grew

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more tender towards the enemy with whom he was about to treat. I suppose we should all feel somewhat in love with the Russians, and feel a deep admiration for their valor, their, — I don't know what else there is to admire in them, but we could find that out, — in case of our falling out with the Americans. When we found ourselves not in a position to fight them we should begin to feel affectionate towards them, and remember old Crimean courtesies, nay, contrast them, the Russians, favorably with our faithful allies the French. Now that Samuel Burton saw the power over his old master slipping through his hands, he began to care for him once more.

CHAPTER LXV.

EX-SECRETARY OXTON GETS A LESSON.

"You must do me the credit to say, dear Mr. Oxton," said the widow North, one evening at the Bend, "that I always hated Mr. O'Ryan most cordially. But I never believed him to be a fool, — yes, I will say it, a fool, — till now."

"You are quite sure he is one, then?" said Mr. Oxton.

"Don't you think so yourself?" said the widow.

"No, I don't," said the Secretary. "I always thought him wonderfully clever and able, but I never thought he would have made a statesman till now. No, I won't abuse the word 'statesman.' I never suspected that he had half as much political sagacity as he is now showing."

"I am at a loss to understand you," said the widow.

"And I am not in a position to explain myself," said Mr. Oxton, rising and laughing.

"You are very unkind and disagreeable," said the good-natured widow. "Aggy, don't you think that a simple mistake about the direction of a letter, could have been got over without your husband's having an hour's *tête-à-tête* with Miss Burke?"

"My dear Eleanor," said Mrs. Oxton, "you are perfectly right. My husband's *penchant* for Miss Burke has caused me the deepest grief and anxiety for many years. It is a painful subject. Let us change the conversation."

"Well," said Mrs. North, laughing, "I won't try to sow dissension between man and wife, particularly as she is coming here to-night. I hate scenes."

"She will hardly come to-night in the thunder-storm, will she?" said Joe. "How terrible the rain is!"

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"Why, no; she cannot move in such weather as this," Mrs. Oxton allowed, and they all agreed.

But presently, just after a blinding flash of lightning, her voice was heard in the hall; and they all crowded out to meet her.

She had got on a macintosh, and had tied a shawl over her bonnet so as completely to hide her face. She looked much more like a man than a woman on the whole, as she stood in the hall, with the wet pouring off her in streams; they only knew it was her by her voice.

"How could you venture out in such weather, my dear Lesbia?" began Mrs. Oxton.

"Mr. Burton, your sisther's come by the stamer; but she 's not gone home; she 's up at my house, and stays there to-night. James Oxton, I'll trouble ye for an audyence in a hurry, alone wid yourself."

Mr. Oxton took her into another room, and left the others wondering. The moment they were alone, and she had moved the shawl from her head, Mr. Oxton saw she looked exceedingly grave.

"James, you may well wonder at my coming out such weather. I have got news which will make you look as grave as me."

"I know you have been doing something kind for me, old friend; I am sure of that."

"Nothing more than coming out in a thunder-storm, and I'd do more than that for ye. It 's some one else ye 're obliged to this time, my dear James. That angel, Emma Burton, who is not only ready and willing to devote her life and her health to any one who may need it, but by some divine kind of luck seems always in the way to do it, — it 's her you 're obliged to this time."

"God bless her beautiful face, and soften her sorrow! I need not pray that she may have peace, for she has that peace which passes understanding. Now, old friend?"

"James, that scoundrel, Sir George Hillyar, has been neglecting Gerty."

"So I supposed, from having none of my letters answered, and from Gerty saying nothing of him."

"But it is worse than that."

"Has he gone off with another woman?"

"Yes."

"I did all I could to prevent it," said poor Mr. Oxton. "What could I do more? He was a very good *parti* for her. How can any one blame me in this miserable business? No! no! I will not say that. I have been deeply to blame, and it will break my poor little Gerty's heart."

Miss Burke sat down on the floor and began to moan.

"Don't make me a scene, there 's a dear old girl; I am not up

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to it. After I let this miserable marriage take place, I should have kept him here. He might have been saved; who knows? Now, get up, Lesbia; you are getting too old to go on like this."

"Not till you know who he has gone off with!—not till you know who he has gone off with!"

"Who is it, then?" said Mr. Oxton, turning sharply on her.

"Mary Nalder! Oh, the weary day, Mary Nalder!"

"Get up directly. How dare you?—In this house!—How dare you repeat such a wicked falsehood, Lesbia? How dare you believe it? She, indeed: and that fellow! Get up, instantly, and give me the name of the scoundrel who dared say such a thing. He shan't wait for Nalder's tender mercies. Get up, and tell me his name."

Miss Burke got up and went to him. "I would'nt have believed it, James, but that the poor child told me herself not half an hour ago."

"What poor child?"

"Gerty. She has run away, and come by Melbourne, walking, and made her way to the Burtons' at Port Romilly. And that saint of a girl has brought her on here, tending her like her own sister, and keeping her quiet."

"Gerty here!"

"Shoeless and worn out. Poor, simple child, she walked three hundred miles through the Bush; and, James ——"

"Let me go to her. The scoundrel!—Aggy! Aggy!"

"Be quiet, James," said Miss Burke, rapidly and decisively. "Don't be a fool. The poor child is out of her mind, and don't know any one but Emma Burton. And you must keep Aggy from her, and you must not go near her yourself. For, James; come and hear a dear old friend quietly. The poor little thing's last craze is that you and Aggy are the cause of the whole mischief. Since you have spoken about Mary Nalder as roundly as you have, you have entirely restored my faith in her, and I beg her pardon for having been so wicked as to believe anything against her. But our own Gerty says, in her madness, that it was you and Aggy who introduced Sir George and Mrs. Nalder at your own house, and that she will never endure the sight of either of you again. You must break this to Aggy, and you must leave her to me and to Emma Burton for the present."

So this was the end of this grand marriage, in which the Secretary had been led to acquiesce in an evil moment, disapproving of it in his heart the whole time. Even if he could not have stopped it in the first instance (as he certainly could) he need not, for the mere sake of a few odd thousands a-year, have committed the fatal fault of letting such a wild hawk as George Hillyar go down the wind, out of call, with such a poor little dove as Gerty for

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his only companion. And now here was Gerty come back, deserted, heart-broken, and mad, cursing him and his wife as the cause of all her misfortunes. And, although the dear little fool was wrong as to particulars, was she not right in the main? Mr. Oxton was more humbled and saddened than he had been for many years. He had always had a most firm faith in the infallibility of his own sagacity, and this was the first great shock it had ever received; and the blow hit him the harder because it came through his heart. From this time forward he was less positive and dictatorial, less certain of his own conclusions. The careless Indian who spilt the pot of wourali poison over Humboldt's stocking was nearly depriving us of the "Kosmos"; and so little Gerty, who was as nearly cracked as any one of her extremely limited intellects can manage to be without the aid of hereditary predisposition, did by her curious Hegira manage to affect the course of affairs to a considerable extent; and that, too, without any accidental or improbable coincidence of time. She not only was the cause of Samuel Burton's going to England after Reuben, but her arrival, in the sad plight which we have described, had the effect on Mr. Oxton mentioned above, — made him more distrustful of foregone conclusions, and more open to negotiation.

But now. Mr. Oxton bent his head down on the table and wept. After a time he looked up again, and said: "The last time I cried, Lesbia, was when Charley Morton's father got the Latin verse prize, instead of me, at Harrow." Miss Burke was standing in her dripping mackintosh, with her head bare, and her long black hair tangled down over her shoulders: with her back against the door, sentinel against intruders, — patient, gentle, nay, almost servile; but with a fierce untamed power in her splendid physique, in her bold black eyes, and in her close set mouth; a true representative of a great nation subdued for three centuries, but never conquered. As Oxton saw that woman in her fantastic dress, with her wild tangled hair, standing against the door, a light seemed to break on him. "She is half a savage," he said to himself. "But is there a nobler woman in the colony? I have never done these people justice. These Irish *must* have more in them than I have ever given them credit for. I will try to think differently of them; I am not too old to learn."

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CHAPTER LXVI.

SOMETHING TO DO.

It was well for poor Emma that she had the care of Gerty just now, for she was pretty nearly heart-broken. Night and day there was but one image before her mind's eye, — Erne lying dead in the bush alone.

But the noble girl suffered in silence, and it was only her red eyes in the morning which told Joseph that she had been weeping all night long. They did not allude to the subject after that first dreadful evening; but, when three days were gone, she said she thought she would like to go to her brother James, and that the steamer sailed that day. Joseph was glad she should go, for her presence seemed like a reproach to him; and so she went her favorite voyage to her favorite brother.

They met in silence, but his silent embrace told her that he loved her only the more dearly in her sorrow, and she was contented. She begged to sleep at James's house, because all her brothers were away at school, and she thought she could sleep better if she had the baby. That night, just before she went across to her brother's house, her mother fell upon her bosom and began weeping wildly; but Emma could not speak of it yet, — she only kissed her mother in silence.

In the middle of the night she came to James's room in infinite distress. "James, my dear," she said, "I shall go out of my mind alone if those native dogs keep howling. There is one of them again. How very, very dreadful."

There was something so terribly suggestive in her noticing the noise of these foul animals in this way, that it frightened James, and made him think too of his poor friend, lying —— where? and how?

They found out that she brooded on this in silence all day long; for the next day, towards evening, she was sitting alone with her mother, and suddenly said, —

"Mother! I suppose that, even if they were to find his body now, I should not recognize it."

"You will know him when you meet him in glory, my darling; among all the ten thousand saints in heaven you 'll know him." This was all that weeping Mrs. Burton could find to say from her bursting heart.

For five days she was like this, — not idle, not morose, only

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very silent. No wild dogs were heard after the first night: James confided to one or two of the leading young men that, under the circumstances, the native dogs were an annoyance to his sister. They took uncommonly good care that the girl who had nursed Tim Reilly's child through the small-pox should not be unnecessarily reminded that her sweetheart was lying dead in the bush. There was no more music from the dingoes after that.

So she remained for that time, never weeping before the others, speaking very little, and only once or twice about Erne. Several times her brother James begged her to talk to him and ease her heart; but her answer was always the same, — "Not yet, dear; not yet." Once he got her to walk out with him; but one of those foul, filthy, cruel, beautiful eagles came rushing through the forest like a whirlwind, just over their heads, and she shut her eyes and stopped her ears, and begged James, for the love of God, to take her home again.

But on the fifth day God sent her relief, and all was well. He sent her work, and her eye grew clear and calm once more, and the deadly lethargy of grief was gone, never to return. The grief was there still; that never could depart any more until death; but God had sent her the only true remedy for it, — the remedy which, acting on sainted souls like hers, destroys self, and therefore makes the wildest grief bearable. He sent her one "whose necessity was greater than her own," — like that of the soldier at Zutphen, — and bade her forget herself, and see to this business for Him, and wait for her reward hereafter.

Gerty came to her, broken down in health, and mad, with her silly, crazed little head filled full of groundless suspicions against those who loved her best. Here was work for her with a vengeance. With a feeling of shame at what she chose to call her own selfish grief, she rose and shook it off. When Gerty had been got to bed, she came down to the assembled family, and at one glance they saw that their old Emma was come back to them.

"My dears," she said, "the steamer goes in four days. If I can get her out of that bed I shall take her to Palmerston. As far as her bodily health is concerned, she has only got a bad rheumatic cold. But I shall take her to Palmerston, to Miss Burke. She is not in her right mind exactly, and yet her pulse is quiet, and her eyes are not dilated. She has got a craze about the Oxtons, and — and — She must go to Miss Burke. I can't undertake to do anything without Miss Burke. I shall take her to Palmerston on Thursday."

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CHAPTER LXVII.

THE BACKSTAIRS HISTORY OF TWO GREAT COALITIONS.

When it was too late, Joseph Burton began to realize to himself the fact that he, by quietly and without remonstrance allowing his sister to devote her life to him, had ruined her life, and had committed a gross act of selfishness. The invalid of the family, among high-bred and high-minded people like the Burtons, is generally nursed and petted into a state of chronic selfishness. Joseph Burton, whose character we have hitherto taken from his brother, had, in spite of his really noble instincts, been spoilt in this way, and hitherto had not thoroughly recovered that spoiling. Now he plunged into politics more wildly than ever, and made love to Mrs. North (who was by no means unwilling to have him make love to her: far from it); and tried to forget Erne's death and Emma's misery.

Mrs. North's question about the folly of Mr. O'Ryan seemed pertinent enough, but Mr. Oxton's answer puzzled her exceedingly. Mr. O'Ryan had never concealed his longing for office and power; but, now he had got it, he seemed to be allowing his party to commit such extreme follies, as would put him in the Opposition once more within a twelvemonth. And yet Mr. Oxton said that he had never before given him credit for any approach to political sagacity. She resolved to get her pretty head as near to Joseph Burton's handsome one as was proper, in a quiet window, on the first opportunity, and make him explain this mysterious speech of Mr. Oxton's.

It wanted explanation, certainly; for, since the foundation of Donnybrook Fair (by King Malachi, or, as Mr. O'Callagan called him, Mellekee, "last of prophets, and first of kings and saints in the Island of Saints"), seldom have the public affairs of any community been brought into such an extraordinary hurly-burly as that into which the O'Ryan ministry succeeded in bringing the affairs of Cooksland. And yet O'Ryan, who might have whipped his dogs in, and gained the respect of the colony, only laughed, and defended each absurdity by a quaint airy Palmerstonian speech, and let things take their course without the slightest concern.

The colony expected a land bill of him (and to tell the honest truth, a land bill was most imperatively necessary), but none was offered to the House by Mr. O'Ryan. He left that to his

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honorable and gallant friend and colleague, Mr. Rory O'More. And, when the provisions of that bill were laid before a paralyzed and awe-stricken House, even Mr. O'Callagan of the *Mohawk* himself was obliged to confess that it was "a divvle of a bill, indeed, indeed, but, Faug a ballagh, we 'd get some piece of it any how."

The chief points in the bill were, that all the waste lands were to be laid open for selection at 5*s.* an acre; that any person holding over eighty acres should pay a tax of 5*s.* per acre per annum; and that all the men who at present held more than eighty acres, should pay a tax of 2*s.* 6*d.* an acre; which last provision, he remarked, would so far recruit the resources of the colony (they would have taken nearly £3,000 a year from Mr. Oxton alone) as to enable them to reduce import duties, and materially diminish their staff of Custom-house officers.

The House would n't have this at all, — more particularly the gentlemen connected with the Customs (most of them Irish), who happened to sit in the House. The bill was rejected by a perfectly resignable majority; but there was not one single hint of resignation from Mr. O'Ryan. And the quidnuncs of the colony began to remark that neither Mr. Oxton, nor Mr. Dawson, in the Upper House, nor Mr. Dempsey in the Lower, were attending to their parliamentary duties, though all three in town.

Mr. Brallagan's new Constitution bill was of a still more astounding nature than Mr. Rory O'More's land bill. It was simply revolutionary. All property qualification was done away with; the Upper House abolished; and every male in the colony of twenty-one, untainted with crime, invested with a vote. Mr. O'Ryan spoke in favor of the bill for about three minutes, with an airy levity which disgusted every one. "You must come to it some day or another; ye 'd better swallow it now. Whether the country 's fit for it or not, it never will be more fit; besides, I have some sort of curiosity to see the thing at work. If we do go smash with it, the Home Government can step in; and, if we don't, why we can give the old lady her *congé*, cut the painter, and start for ourselves."

Joseph Burton rose after Mr. O'Ryan, and in a short, stinging speech denounced the insane folly of virtually putting the government of the country into the hands of the most unfortunate and most unthrifty of the old country. "With regard to one half of the emigrants now entering our ports," continued Joe, "I affirm that their mere presence in this colony proves them to be unable to manage their own affairs with any success. The result of conferring full political privileges on a thriftless, selfish, and idle population would be that the most worthless class would be legislated for, and that the other and more respectable classes,

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overpowered by numbers, would be neglected; that government would be forced by the demagogues to divert the revenue to unproductive works to create sham labor, and that there would arise a lazzaroni more pestilent than that of Naples."

Not a word did Joe utter against Mr. O'Ryan. The bill was lost by a large majority. One of the younger Conservative members rose and gave notice of a motion of want of confidence. The day came and the vote was put; Mr. O'Ryan was victorious by three votes; and so public business came to a dead standstill. Only, the Governor having politely remarked that he would be glad of a little money on account, they made a House and voted him his salary. As for the rest of the budget, not the slightest effort was made to bring it in; forcing a budget of any kind through a House, with a majority of three, which might yet, on any day, in consequence of a hot wind, or the mail steamer coming in, or a steeple chase, or a missionary meeting, or a prize-fight, or a thunder-storm, dwindle to a minority of nine, was too much trouble. Meanwhile affairs were come to a dead lock, and it was notorious that no funds were in hand for the payment of officials for more than two months.

When matters were just at this pass, it so happened that Mrs. North's pretty little carriage was conveying her quickly down Sturt Street, through the broiling summer noon; when she saw, walking rapidly on the pavement before her, a large white umbrella, with somebody's legs under it; at the sight of which she hailed her coachman, and made him pull up beside the pavement. The radiant face of Joseph Burton looked out from under the umbrella, and the widow perceived that "ex pede Herculem," — she had looked in his face so long and so earnestly, that now she could recognize him by the shape of his legs.

He looked so unutterably happy that his joy communicated itself to the kind little widow from the mere force of sympathy, leaving alone and not considering the fact that she was over head and ears in love with him. She was going to speak, when he anticipated her.

"Dear Mrs. North, will you drive me somewhere?"

She was going to say, "I will drive you anywhere if you will look at me like that!" but she did n't. She only said, "Jump in. Where?"

"The Bend."

"The Bend," cried out Mrs. North to the coachman. And away went "Lothario" — second-best trotter in the colony — like a steam-engine.

"What makes you look like this?" said Mrs. North, laying her hand on his arm; "have you good news?"

"News which has brought me to life, and made a man of me

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once more," said Joe. "I have carefully concealed it from you, my dear friend; but I have been in deep distress lately, and the cause of that distress is suddenly removed, and I could sing for joy."

Now Mrs. North was one of the most excellent and admirable little women alive. But she had got to love Joe, and she knew that Joe loved her. She also knew well Joe's ultra-sensitiveness about his deformity, and was well aware that he, with his intense pride, would never lay himself open to the chance of a refusal, would never speak until he knew he was safe; therefore she saw that she would have to do a great deal of a certain sort of work herself which is generally, by old custom and tradition, done by the gentleman, and yet do it in a way which should not in the slightest degree clash with Joe's exceedingly unpractical and book-gathered notions of womanly modesty.

And, if any one was to ask my opinion, I don't think the little woman was in the least to blame. One would not care to see it done by a girl of twenty: but a widow of twenty-six is quite a different matter. I think she acted wisely and well all through.

She withdrew her hand from Joe's arm. "Were you blind enough, and foolish enough, to think that you could conceal it from *me*?" That was all she said.

Joe began, "My dear Mrs. North ——" but she interrupted him.

"Come," she said, "we will talk of something else. Like most other men, you can be good-natured, even while you are bitterly unkind. After such a strong instance of the latter, just merely for a change, give me a specimen of the former, and explain this political complication which puzzles us all so."

"Dear Mrs. North," said Joe, in distress, "don't embitter the happiest day in my life by being unkind to me." — The widow's hand immediately went back on to his wrist, and she said eagerly, "My dear Mr. Burton ——"

"There, I knew you were not seriously angry," said Joe, with a brightened face. "Come, I will soon explain the state of affairs, which is so puzzling to the outsiders."

"But are you sure, dear Mr. Burton," said this conscientious and high-souled widow, "that you are violating no confidence? Oh! if you were to render yourself for one moment uneasy by having reposed, in a moment of excitement, confidence in me, the recollection of which would hereafter render you unhappy, I should never, never ——"

"I shall keep no secrets from you in future," said Joe, solemnly. Which the widow thought was getting on pretty well, considering.

The dead-lock in public affairs, as described by Joe, in a delicious drive through shade and sunlight, towards the Bend, was

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simply this. (It is not hard to understand, and will not take long):—

O'Ryan had been a thorough-going ultra-Republican, a man who believed that the summit of human happiness, and of political sagacity, would consist in putting supreme power into the hands of the majority, and letting them settle their own destinies, without taking into account whether or no a population so peculiarly formed as that of Cooksland, were in the least capable of knowing what was best for them, or of electing the men who could.

His innumerable good qualities, his undoubted talents, his great powers of debate gave him, most justly, the entire confidence of his party. He could, most probably, when he first found himself in power, through the fatal folly of James Oxton, have got through a new Constitution bill,—so liberal, that all backward steps would have been impossible, as it would seem they have become in Victoria; and the carrying out of his extreme theories would have followed shortly as a matter of course. But, before this happened, two persons had been acting on his somewhat facile and plastic nature, and had modified his opinions considerably.

The first of these was Dempsey, the Irish rebel, the greatest anomaly from the island of bulls,—a man so good, so pure in life, so unselfish, and so high-minded, that there were times when one was ashamed that he should bow to one; a man who had shown such great political ability, when he was once removed from his craze of independent Irish nationality; and yet a man who, in his frantic effort in 1848, had shown that he was less able to calculate on the earnestness of the peasants, and the power of the Government, than Smith O'Brien or Duffy;—a man who ought to have been respected and loved by every one for his good qualities, or shot like a mad dog. You never knew whether the former or the latter fate was the right one for him.

This man had a restless craving after power; but since '48 he had learnt what real power was, and saw that it was impossible to enjoy it with such gentlemen as Mr. O'More, and Mr. Brallagan, or with such an organ as the *Mohawk*, and longed to find himself back again among his peers, to have his share of power with the Oxtons and the O'Reillys,—to regain the ground he had lost, by what he now thought a wicked and inconsiderate rebellion against a government which, however misguided, was generous and kind. Moreover, though he had been a rebel, he had never been a Republican. This man, both because he was a relation, and because his eminence was undoubted, had a great deal of influence over O'Ryan, and used it in favor of moderation.

Another person who had great power over him was an old

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friend, Miss Burke, the peacemaker. She had the profoundest contempt for men of the Brallagan school, — men with no qualities worth naming except fierce and noisy impudence, and a profound belief in their own powers. She took care that this contempt should never die out of her cousin's bosom, and certainly few people possessed greater powers of sarcasm than she. No one was ever more able to make any one else contemptible and ridiculous.

Acted on by these people, O'Ryan grew more and more tired of his "tail," and more and more anxious to ally his own talents and those of the pick of his party to the other talents of the colony, and form a sound, respectable, moderately liberal government. But what was to be done with the "tail?" To announce without preparation a coalition from which they were excluded, would be to whistle "Vinegar Hill" at a Tipperary fair.

"Hang it," he said, laughing, one day to Dempsey, "I have committed myself to these men, and I can't back out. I will give them an innings. Let them exhibit their statesmanship before the country; they will be easier to deal with afterwards."

He did so. With what result we know. Negotiations had been set on foot for a coalition; and the negotiators had been Miss Burke and Joseph Burton.

Everything had gone smoothly until Mr. Dempsey was brought on the carpet. James Oxton had gracefully met O'Ryan half way, and O'Ryan had yielded with great good sense. But, when Mr. Dempsey's name was mentioned, Mr. Oxton peremptorily told Joseph Burton that he would sit in no cabinet with a gentleman who had been in arms against her Majesty's authority; and O'Ryan with equal firmness instructed Miss Burke to say that he must decline forming part of any Ministry which did not include his friend Dempsey.

"This was the knot all yesterday, dear friend," said Joseph; "but it is so nobly untied. Dempsey has deputed me to say to Mr. Oxton that the matter in hand is far nearer to his heart than any personal ambition could be, — that he foregoes all his claims, and will earnestly support the new Ministry from the back benches."

"Noble fellow!" cried Mrs. North. "And is it this which has made you so happy!"

"Oh, no; something far different."

"Here we are," said eager Mrs. North, as the carriage dashed quickly into the gravelled court-yard, setting the cockatoos screaming, and bringing all the dogs out at them by twenty vomitories. "I will wait and take you back with your answer. Make haste."

Joe was not long gone. "Drive straight to Mr. Dempsey's

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at the Stockade," he cried. "My dear creature! at length it is all over and done."

"What did Mr. Oxton say?"

"He said, 'Go, if you please, and tell Mr. Dempsey that I am not to be outdone in nobleness by him or any other man. Say that I request him to sit in the cabinet with us, as a personal favor, and hope to sit there many years with one who has learnt so well, in whatever school, to sacrifice his own ambition for the public good.'"

"You and Lesbia deserve the thanks of every man and woman in the colony. I am proud of your acquaintance. You are to have a seat in the cabinet, of course?"

"Yes, I am to be Minister of Education."

She was looking at him when he said the last three words, and saw that, for the first time, he fully appreciated the grandeur of the position to which he had found himself elevated. As he said the words "Minister of Education," his face flushed and the pupils of his eyes expanded. "That is well," thought Mrs. North. "I wonder if he means to speak."

Apparently he meant to hold his tongue, for he did it. There was a long silence, during which Joe twice turned towards her, and twice turned away. "I suppose I must do it myself, then, after all," thought Mrs. North.

"Ah, me!" she said in a sweet low voice; "I suppose I shall see but little of the Minister of Education: you will have but little spare time for my tittle-tattle now. However, the past is our own. You can never deprive me of the recollection of the pleasant talks we have had together; and at all events I can watch your career from a distance. I shall have that pleasure, at all events."

"Mrs. North," began Joe. "If I was not a cripple ——" here he stopped again.

Dead silence on the part of Mrs. North.

"If I was not a cripple, I should ask you if I might dare ——"

Mrs. North's little hand was gently laid on Joe's.

"Mary, I love you."

"And I love you, Joseph. And I will prove it to you between this and the grave, if God spares me."

"Propose to him myself, dear?" said Mrs. North to Mrs. Oxton next day. "No, my dear, I assure you on my word of honor that I was not driven so far as that. But I should have done so in ten minutes more, dear; and so I don't deceive you."

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CHAPTER LXVIII.

SAMUEL BURTON MAKES HIS LAST VISIT TO STANLAKE.

"A CURSED climate," said Samuel Burton, between his set teeth; "a God-forgotten climate. If I can get my boy away out of this, *I'll* never set foot in it again. *He* may come home here and live like a gentleman, when I have made his fortune, and am ——"

He could not say the word "dead." He could not face it. He cursed himself for having approached so near the subject. If any one had been watching his face, he would have seen a look of wild ghastly terror in it.

The time and place, when and where, we pick him up again, were not by any means cheerful or inspiriting. He was toiling, in pitch darkness, through wild November sleet, over one of the high downs near Croydon, towards Stanlake.

"I would n't care for anything," he went on musing, "if it was n't for that. If I was n't afraid of dying, I could be happy. And it ain't what is to come after that frightens me, neither; there is uncertainty enough about *that*. But it is the act of dying which frightens me so. It must be so very, very horrid. Bah! I have lived a coward, and, oh Lord, I must die a coward. Why, the distinct dread of the terror I shall feel in dying nearly maddens me. What will the terror itself be like, when I feel it coming on?"

Although the bitter sleet was driving in his face, and racking his sun-warmed muscles with twinges of rheumatism, yet he found that he was in a sweat, — in the sweat of hopeless terror.

"And yet the main of men ain't afraid of it. There was that young keeper at Stanlake in old times, — what was his name again? — ah! Bill Harker, that was the man, — that was shot. He died hard enough, but he was n't afraid of it; and I was n't afraid of seeing a fellow die neither in those times, as I am now. He was n't afraid of it for *himself;* he kept on, when the very death-agony was on him, 'Oh, my poor wife! Oh, what will become of my poor little wife!' What the devil made him think of *her*, I wonder, at such a time as that, with an ounce of small shot in his stomach?"

That was very puzzling indeed; but he did not let it puzzle him long. He came back to the great point at issue: How this terror of the act of dying, — which was undoubtedly a nuisance

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so great that at times it made life not worth having, — was to be abated or abolished. Nuisances not half so great had been often denounced by the public press as being inconsistent with progress. And yet here was a great standing public nuisance, with no remedy suggested. He was obliged to bring his train of thought to a standstill, and curse the climate "*pour s'amuser.*"

"I wish I knew where my boy was living," he began thinking again. "I shall have to make to Morton's lodge; and there are certain risks about that. He might give me up; and, before Sir George could be communicated with, I should be tight in for ten years over the Lawrence Street business. It's a terrible risk my being here. Why, Sir George could n't save me, if I was seen by the traps. However, I 'll have my boy out of this if I die for it."

As he walked he got drenched to the skin in the icy shower; and his courage cooled. "I hardly dare go near him; I think I must be mad; but he is never the man to give up an old fellow-servant who knows so much. No."

Scrambling down the steep chalk wall of Whitley Hill, he came to the long grass ride through Whitley Copse which led to Morton's lodge. The moon, fighting with the northeasterly scud, shone out sometimes and showed him his way; so, during a longer gleam than any which had gone before, he found himself close to the lodge, which was perfectly dark and silent in the moonlight; though he could see that another great bank of rack was driving up, and that night would soon be black once more.

He hesitated, and then whistled. As he had expected, Rory and Tory, (Irish,) Lad and Ony, (Ladoga and Onega, Russian,) Don and Sancho, (Spanish,) Lady and Lovely, (Clumber,) not to mention Vic, Jip, Jack, Nip, Ven, Dick, and Snap, (English terriers,) took up the question all at once: declared that they had never closed an eye; that they had heard him a mile off, but had deep political reasons for not barking before; and generally behaved with that mixture of humbug and overstrained conscientiousness which dogs assume when they are taken by surprise.

Samuel had lived so long in a country where hydrophobia is unknown that he had almost forgotten the existence of that horrible disease, and would far sooner have faced a dangerous dog than an innocent slow-worm. He merely scolded them away, right and left, and, going up to the door, knocked loudly.

A voice, evidently from bed, said, "Father, is that you?"

He said, "Yes, Reuben. Get up, and let me in."

The owner of the voice was heard instantly to get out of bed. In a few moments a young man had opened the door, and was standing before Samuel in his shirt and breeches, looking at him

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with eager curiosity. But it was not Reuben; it was a taller young man than he, with a very square face, and keen blue eyes. Though he had nothing on but his breeches and shirt, he stood there with his bare legs in the cold night air for more than half a minute, staring at Samuel.

Samuel saw the father's face at once. "You are young Morton," he said.

"Yes," said the young man; "and, from what you said just now, you must be Reuben's father, Sam Burton. I have heard a deal of you, but I never thought to have seen you. Come in."

Young Morton dressed himself, and took another long look at Samuel. "So you are come after Reuben?"

"No," said Samuel, lying, because it was easiest. "I have come after your father; but where is Reuben?"

"He is with father."

"Can you tell me where your father is? I want to see him on a matter of life and death."

The young man turned his face to the fire, and remained silent a long time. At last he said, —

"I hope I am not doing wrong in telling you, Mr. Burton. I was told to tell no one. We are in terrible trouble and confusion here, and I hope I shall not increase it. But I will sleep over it. You must stay here to-night, and to-morrow morning, unless I alter my mind, I will tell you."

Young Morton did not alter his mind in the morning; just before they parted he said, —

"You know the Black Lion, Church Street, Chelsea?"

Samuel rather thought he did. He, however, expressed to young Morton that he had some vague recollection of a licensed victualler's establishment, not a hundred miles from that spot, with a somewhat similar sign.

Young Morton laughed. "Well, my father and Reuben are to be heard of there," he said.

"But, my dear young man," said Samuel, "I put it to you whether I dare go near the place. Come."

"I don't know anything about that, Mr. Burton. There they are; and, if you want to see them, there you must go. Good morning."

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CHAPTER LXIX.

SIR GEORGE AND SAMUEL CLOSE THEIR ACCOUNTS, AND DISSOLVE PARTNERSHIP.

SNEAKING from pillar to post, sauntering into doorways and waiting till suspicious persons had passed, sometimes again walking briskly, as though with a purpose before him, and sometimes turning his back on the place for which he was bound, Samuel Burton at length reached the narrow passage which leads into Garden Grove, and set himself to watch the Black Lion.

It was eight o'clock, and a bitterly bleak night. The keen east wind, after roaming through the dust heaps in Garden Grove, concentrated itself, and rushed through this passage, as through a large organ pipe, of which Samuel formed the reed. His whole body began to give forth a dull, monotonous wail from every projection, which increased in violence with the strength of the agonizing wind, but never altered one single note. When he *did* get to bed after this eventful night he instantly dreamt that he was an Æolian harp, and that Sir George Hillyar the elder came and tuned him.

The dry, searching wind, intensely cold, pinched up his already pinched-up face, until it looked more like that of a weasel than of a man; and his long, thin nose, red and blue, peered querulously out into the darkness, as though he were looking with that, and not with the beady eyes above it, deep sunk under his heavy eyebrows. There came two impudent and low-lived boys into the passage, the one of whom formally introduced him to the other. "This, Ben," said the young ruffian, "is my uncle, the undertaker's man. He 's awaiting for a ride home in the hearse, and is going inside, as his lungs is delicate."

He really did look like something of that kind; for, when he had taken to pietism, to see what that would do for him, he had, as being the first and easiest step in that direction, taken to dress himself in black clothes with a white necktie; and, although he had given up religion as a bad job, finding that even the lowest and most superstitious form of it demanded inexorably a moral practice which to him seemed a ghastly impossibility, yet he stuck, at all events, to what he considered one of the outward symbols of godliness, and always appeared in public in so scrupulously correct a costume that it would have stricken one of our advanced young parsons dumb with a mingled feeling of wonder and contempt.

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So he stood for a long time, shivering with cold, and thinking whether he dared show himself in the bar of the Black Lion, and concluding most unhesitatingly that he dared not. But, if Reuben and Morton were to be heard of there, there was every chance of his seeing one or another of them coming in or out; so he waited. I suspect it is easier for an old convict to wait than for you or me. When one has got accustomed to wait in the blank horrid darkness of a prison cell for the warder to bring one one's food, waiting becomes easy, although patience may be a virtue which has taken wings long ago.

So he waited impatiently, cursing time, for one knows not how long. But after a while he cursed no more, and was impatient no more. Every other feeling was absorbed in one, — intense eager curiosity.

The shrill driving easterly wind had brought the London smoke with it, mixed with fog; it had been barely possible to see across the street. Samuel had tried, three or four times, to make out the vast looming mass of Church Place, — the old home of the Burtons, — in the darkness, and had not succeeded. But by one of those laws which guide the great river fogs, some side puff of wind, some sudden change in the weight of the atmosphere, the river fog was lifted, and the whole of the great house stood out before him. It was all dark below, but aloft the great dormer window, — the window of Reuben's old room, — was blazing with light.

He watched now with bated breath. He could see the old palings which surrounded the house, and saw that the gate in them was open. He had not long found out this when he saw Reuben and Morton together come out from that gate, cross the street, and go into the "Black Lion."

Like a cat, like a weasel, like a slinking leopard, — like a young member, with no faith save the rules of debate, whatever they may be, who sits with hungry eyes to catch a poor old man, old enough to be his grandfather, tripping, — Samuel Burton slid across the street, and passed unobserved and wondering into the old house.

His first idea had been to wait about in the vast rooms, which he saw were lightless and deserted, until he found out how the land lay; and with this view he slipped into the great room on the first floor, and waited there in the dark. But not for long. There were too many ghosts there; and ghosts, as every one knows, have no manners, — they have never yet been made to take any hint, however strongly given, that their company is unacceptable: they will not behave even like the most tiresome of morning visitors, and go when the lady of the house sees something remarkable out of window. The behavior of the ghosts in

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this empty old room was exceedingly rude toward the miserable, godless, superstitious old convict. One gentleman, indeed, an ex-warder, whose brains Samuel had seen knocked out with a shovel, in a stringy-bark forest, some fifteen years before, was so offensively assiduous in his attentions that he found it necessary to go out on to the stairs, and, when there, to go up them towards what might be capture and ruin, sooner than have any further *tête-à-tête* with the Sintram companions, whose acquaintance he had made in a life of selfish rascality.

But he really was not much alarmed; he saw there was some hole-and-corner work going on, and that gave him confidence. People who took possession of the garrets of deserted houses must be doing something secret, something in his way. The risk was certainly great, but he determined to face it. Sneaking curiosity had become a second nature to him; and, besides, it was not a much greater danger than he had run in approaching the place at all.

So he gained the door of Reuben's room, and looked in, and then drew back amazed. It was comfortably furnished, and full of light, not only from a blazing fire, but from two or three candles dispersed about it. Everything was still, except a heavy breathing of some sleepers; and after a momentary hesitation he looked in again.

On a sofa opposite to him was stretched a large man, sleeping heavily. In a bed close to the fire lay another man, with his face turned from him; and both were apparently asleep. The man on the sofa had his face turned towards him, and he could see every feature plainly. And, after the first glance at that face, curiosity mastered every other feeling, and he went softly in and gazed on him.

A big, red-faced, handsome giant, whose chest went gently up and down in the deep breathing of sleep, and whose innocent, silly mouth was wreathed into a smile at some foolish dream! Samuel thrust his long thin nose close to him, and his little eyes dilated with a maddened curiosity. He knew him, and he did n't know him. Who on earth *was* it? As he stood there watching, risk, time, place, everything was forgotten. Where *had* he seen this man before? He sent his memory ranging back to the very beginning of his life, and could not remember. Had he gone mad? — or had he slept for twenty years, and had Erne Hillyar grown into this?

And who could that be in bed? A sick man, for the evidences of sickness were there in plenty. Curiosity and awe had overmastered fear now; he stole to the bed, sat down in a chair beside it, and watched, wondering, till the sick man should turn his face towards him, feeling that when he did so this wonderful riddle would be read.

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He did not wait many minutes. Sir George Hillyar turned uneasily towards him, and recognized him, and Samuel saw the word "death" written on his face.

We are strange, contradictory creatures! — the highest and the lowest of us: David, — David, King of Israel, I mean, not the painter, — and Marat. Call it a truism; it is none the less true. When this wretched scoundrel saw his old master dying here miserably, before his years were ripe, a purer and nobler sentiment warmed his rotten old heart, and showed itself in those darkened little windows of his eyes, than had place in him since he had knelt at his mother's knee. Deep, deep pity. It bore no lasting fruit; the man died as he had lived, — for amendment seems to become an impossibility after a certain point, at least in this world. But, though the spring got choked up once more, still it *had* welled up, and shown that there was water beneath the soil.

The history of the soul of a thorough-going rascal like Samuel Burton "remains to be written." *We* can't do it; we can only describe the outside of such, and say what we saw them do under such and such circumstances, as we have done with Samuel Burton. As for what they think, feel, and believe, they lie so horribly and habitually that the chances are ten to one that every other word they speak is false. Samuel Burton's character has been sketched after long and intimate confidences with many convicts. I used at one time to make after a new convict as I would after a new butterfly, and try — hopeless task! — to find out when he was lying and when he was telling the truth. The result has been Samuel Burton. But I have, at all events, found out two things. The first is that a man who has just told you with infinite glee about the share he had in robbing a church, will invariably deny, with virtuous indignation, that he had any share whatever in the crime for which he was transported. His brother always did *that;* and his wife, in a moment of misplaced confidence, received the stolen property into the house in a basket of greens, which was found standing on the sink when the "traps" came. And the second is that, until we can catch a thoroughbred scoundrel, with high literary ability, and strict regard to truth, we had better not talk too fast about the reformation of criminals.

But I can only say that the case of Samuel Burton was just as I have stated it. Sir George and he recognized one another at once, but Sir George spoke first.

"Is it you in the flesh, or are you but another dream?"

"It is I, Sir George, and I am deeply grieved to find you here, and so ill. But cheer up, sir, we will set you right in no time, sir. You must come over to Stanlake, and get about, sir. You will soon be well."

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"I am dying, Samuel. I have been going too hard, harder than ever; and you know how hard *that* is! Whence have you come?"

"From Australia, Sir George."

"So you were there all the time," said Sir George, evincing a feeble interest. "Well, all that is over; I forgive, and hope to be forgiven. When you know what I have to tell you, you will use your power mercifully."

"I have reason to believe that my power is gone, sir."

"How so?"

"Your brother Erne is dead."

"Poor Erne! Tell me how."

"He died gold-hunting, sir."

"Poor fellow! poor fellow! I wonder if he forgave me?"

"He loved you, Sir George."

"I dare say. I can see many things now. I would put much to rights if I lived. I dare say he is better off where he is. When I see him I shall tell him the whole business."

"But you are not going to die, Sir George; there are years of life in you yet. Come, sir, you must get well, and we will put things on another footing."

Sir George Hillyar actually laughed.

"Why do you go on lying to a dying man, Samuel; you saw death in my face, or you would never have told me that Erne was dead. Morton and Reuben are on the stairs now,—I hear them. If Erne is dead, I have strength left to tell them to hand you over to the next policeman for the Stanlake robberies,—I holding your circumstantial confession of them."

"You would n't do it, Sir George. Come, I know you won't do it. See, time is short; they are coming. I wish I may be struck dead if this ain't the real truth. Mr. Erne is not *known* to be dead, but he is missing. He may have got to some station on the Ovens, or Mitta, or King, hard up, and be staying there. You won't go and beggar your own child, and ruin me at this time of day. The wrong is done, and can't be mended now. Die silent, sir, like a fox. Think of your son, sir."

"How can I die silent, you villain," said poor Sir George, raising himself in bed, "with you here persuading me to leave this miserable world with an act of rascality? I could have done it, I was going to do it, for I don't fear death like you, you hound; but the Devil, nay, it may be God, has sent you here to put the whole villany of the matter before me once more, and force me either to ruin my heir Reuben, or to die like a scoundrel, with a crime against poor innocent Erne on my soul Is he dead or alive? You will soon be either one or the other if you tempt me to rise from this bed and fall upon you."

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"I don't know rightly, sir," said Samuel, rising as pale as a sheet. "Strike me blind if I know. I was only begging you to let things go on as they were, and not say anything about the will in my possession, partly because I am an old man, a poor feeble old man, sir, and partly because I should not like to see your beautiful little angel of a son, — I should not like to see that dear child, — coming into my hut two months ago, when her ladyship lost herself in the bush, and he came into my poor little place like a praying seraph, — because I should not like to see him left with only Stanlake, mortgaged over head and ears — "

Sir George laughed again. "Magnificent bathos," he said. "So you have seen my wife and child, hey? But, oh, most strangely complicated liar, I was not thinking of that poor little brat, but of my dear devoted son and heir, Reuben."

"Reuben?"

"Yes, Reuben. That poor fool deceived us all. Curse you, I am not going into all that horrible business again on my deathbed. Have some decency. You did not know that I was married in Scotland."

"I did not accompany you to Scotland, sir."

"No. Even in my wickedness I had grace enough left to leave you behind. The new atmosphere was at all events purer than the old. But who did?"

"Young Ben, the keeper's son from the Wiltshire farms, went with you, sir, — her ladyship's brother."

"And do you know who is lying on that sofa? — Ben, old fellow, get up; I want some lemonade."

The giant rose up, and Samuel was puzzled no more. He knew him now, poor drunken Uncle Ben. "I will get you your drink, Sir George, if you will allow me," he said. And Sir George said, "Never mind, Ben; lie down again;" — which Uncle Ben did.

"He was so awfully like Mr. Erne when he was asleep that I was puzzled," said Samuel. "Now, Sir George, let us have a little quiet talk about this delusion of yours."

"Delusion! It is shared among others by Compton, who considers the legal evidence quite sufficient. I married her in Scotland. I never told you that — Reuben is my legitimate son — She concealed the fact from Morton — She never believed herself really married, and I hardly thought that such a farce could be binding in law. But she many times voluntarily told Ben the whole truth, and left a witnessed statement. It is no use to fight against facts, you know. You may fight, but in six hours Reuben will be in possession of Stanlake. And, if Erne is dead, of the rest."

It seemed so very consistent, and so very like truth, that Sam-

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uel felt it must be true. The best cards were all in his adversary's hand, and his adversary had shown him his cards, careless whether he won or lost. Poor Samuel had but three ways of playing, — threatening, lying, and whining; and now he tried the last, not because he dreamt of its succeeding, — for, so stony-hearted is the world, that he had never found it do any good whatever, — but because — because — Well, I do not know why; they always do it. Detect a liar for yourself; wait till the impudent defiant fit is over, and he begins to whine, and then ask him what he expects to gain by it. If he cannot tell you, I am sure I cannot.

"Are you going to have no mercy on a poor broken old man, Sir George? Are you going to take my boy from me, and leave me no one to comfort and console me on the way to my miserable grave?"

"Yes," said Sir George, angrily. "I wish to be at peace."

Samuel rose, for Morton and Reuben were in the room. He went and talked to them while Sir George Hillyar was sleeping; and after a time Mr. Compton came in, and the whole miserable business was talked through between him, Uncle Ben, Mr. Compton, and Morton. He saw that the proofs were overwhelming, and after a time went and sat by himself, feeling, poor dog, more unutterably lonely, deserted, and miserable than he had ever felt in his life.

He sat awake all night. Towards morning, when Mr. Compton had gone, and the other three were asleep, he heard Sir George move, and instantly went towards him. Sir George's face was calmer now, and even kind. He stretched out his hand to Samuel, and said, —

"Let us forgive one another. We have both to receive punishment, but my mind is not such a shifting quicksand as yours, and I think I see that I am the most to blame. We have both fallen, I cannot quite see why or how, into a horrible pit full of moral evil; or, to put it more truly, I, with the strongest nature, fell, and dragged you with me. You, my poor Samuel, don't know truth from falsehood, or right from wrong; I doubt if you ever did. I have always seen the difference, and in consequence have made such a hell of this world that I have some idea, — some notion — But I have nothing to go upon, except my own possibly distorted notions of justice. What matters it my speculating? I shall soon be in possession of facts. I see — I mean I feel — one thing: that I wish to forgive and be forgiven; and so I tell you that I have been seeking your life these two years. Can you forgive that?"

"Yes! yes! But you are not going to die! You could not be dying, and speak so calm as this!"

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"My throat is even now choking. The effort of breathing in my next sleep will wake me, and you will hear me rattling, and I shall die,—probably without speaking. Say all you have to say now."

"But are you not afraid, sir? Is it not terrible to die?"

"What on earth can there be to be *afraid* of? The future is doubtful, certainly,—the sooner over the better. But it *must* come sooner or later."

"Certainly, sir; but the act of dying,—I beg pardon. I have to say to you, sir, that whatever I have to forgive is freely forgiven. And," continued Samuel, in a burst of emotion, really at the moment heartfelt, though possibly somewhat out of place, "you have much to forgive also. But, tell me, sir, what I am to do about this will?"

"*I* don't know," said Sir George Hillyar; "*I* can't decide a question between morality and sentiment on my death-bed. It depends on whether Erne is dead or no. I don't know what it depends on. I thought you were very fond of Reuben."

"So I was, sir. But what is Reuben to me now?"

"Then you never loved him for his own sake. There is no doubt of his paternity. I did."

He was silent after this for some time, and Samuel thought he was asleep. But after a few minutes he roused up, and said again, "Is all forgiven?" And Samuel said, "All, sir." And then he fell asleep.

Samuel sat watching him till near six, and then he roused the others. Sir George was right as to the result, though wrong as to the cause. There was no rattling in his throat. The cold morning air found its way to his drink-rotted lungs, and they ceased to crepitate. He woke, sighed, and died.

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CHAPTER LXX.

REUBEN'S TEMPTATION.

Sir Reuben Hillyar and old Morton made much of Samuel, and explained to him the circumstance of his being there. After some time Morton and Uncle Ben left, and Reuben and Samuel were alone together.

"Can we go anywhere and have some conversation together, Sir Reuben?" said Samuel.

It was the first time he had been called by his title, and he started. He proposed that they should go to a room over the way, and so they went.

It was an exceedingly awkward interview. Samuel sat with his head buried in his hands, and did not speak. Reuben had to begin.

"I am afraid you feel this very keenly. I was shocked at first at our change of relationship, for you were very kind to me. I thank you for all your kindness to me, and shall always remain fond of you."

Still no answer. Reuben saw that the old man was crying, and spoke to him still more gently.

"I am very sorry that we should have to separate, but I fear that it would not be safe for you to remain in England. Your company was always pleasant to me, even when it involved danger."

"We never had one word together, Reuben, — had we?" said Samuel, who had now found his voice.

"Never one," said Reuben. "I fear you must have thought me unkind in not communicating with you lately, but he had persuaded me of all this long before Uncle Ben came to Sir George to unbosom himself about what my mother had told him, and to ask his advice. That was the reason of my silence. I could not write to you, 'my dear father,' could I?"

"I was right, then, in thinking that it was his doing," said Samuel. "It is lucky for all of us that he did not provoke me to do something which I had it in my power to do, — very lucky. If I had been aggravated into putting Erne on the throne, I should have been sorry for it now."

Reuben, not understanding what he meant, and hearing Erne's name, said, —

"And so poor Erne is dead?"

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"Don't you be so sure of that, my — Sir Reuben. Don't be too sure of that. You may find yourself a beggar yet."

"How so?"

"Like this, my dear sir. The late Sir George Hillyar — your grandfather I am alluding to — made a will, by which he left £8000 a year to Mr. Erne, and only Stanlake and £2000 to your father. If Mr. Erne were not dead, — and, if you press me hard, I don't think he is, — the production of that will would ruin you, would it not?"

"I suppose it would. Well?"

"That will is in my possession," whispered Samuel eagerly. "I stole it. Ha! ha! What do you think of that? Stole it!"

"I hope you will give it up."

"It ruins you. Do you see? Silence! Was that any one coming? Here it is. Take it; there is the fire, do you see? blazing high. Be quick; it will soon be over."

The old man actually drew the will from his breast-pocket, and put it, — with his long thin fingers trembling while he grudgingly relinquished the terrible power which he had held so long, — into Reuben's hand. Reuben took it and looked at it, saying, —

"Well, this beats everything. This is actually the will, is it? Well, it 's a nuisance, but it can't be helped. I must drop my title and emigrate, I suppose." So saying, he put the will in his breast and buttoned his coat over it.

"Put it in the fire, you fool," said old Samuel, clutching Reuben's arm with his long fingers; "put it in the fire, or I 'll tear it away from you again. If you were to meet with an accident and that was found on you, you 'd be transported."

"It shan't be on me long," said Reuben. "It shall be in Mr. Compton's hands in an hour."

"I 'll tear it from you!" said Samuel. "You dare n't, — you won't, — hit an old man like me. And I 'll tear it out of your heart if you don't give it to me. Damn you, do you think I am going to sit by and see my game thrown to the four winds like this? I gave it to you from pure love, and now you are going to do justice with it! Do you think I perilled my life and my immortal soul to have justice done? Confound you, I 'll have it back again. I 'll tear it out of your heart, you false, ungrateful lad. Give it up!"

The old man threw himself on to Sir Reuben, and plucked at the breast of his coat. But Reuben laid his strong hand quietly on the old man's breast, and merely said, "Steady, steady, dad. Remember, for God's sake what the effect of a row would be here, and now!"

Samuel was quiet in an instant. He sat down and began another line of action, far more dangerous to Reuben than any amount of violence would have been.

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He waited a little before he began. At last he said,—

"It 's a fine thing to be a baronet."

"I suppose so," said Reuben; "but I have n't thought about it yet. I have n't realized my position."

"I 'd sooner," said Samuel, with a thoughtful expression, "for my part, be a sweep, or what is worse, a cooper,—nay a night man, than be a Bart. without property."

Reuben said, "Ah!"

"You have no prestige. Nobody cares for a Bart. If you were a lord, with a seat in the Upper House, that 's another thing. Your order would take care of you. I believe there 's a fund for poor lords. But a Bart.! Lord! the things I 've seen poor Barts. drove to. Some of them goes on the stage for a time, till the public are sick of 'em. Some of them billiard-marks; all of them trades on their title, and takes to drink. There is no place for a broken-down Bart. under heaven; and that 's what you are unless you put that paper in the fire."

No particular effect on Reuben; at least, no answer.

"Ah, how bitterly you 'll find *that* out in a year's time, with nothing but Stanlake, and Erne's claims upon it! Why, if he presses his claim, you are a ruined and miserable man: and it is not too late to alter it, even yet."

Poor Reuben began to look haggard and thoughtful. Who can blame him that in the first flush of his new fortunes he had looked forward with delighted anticipation to the splendid future? He had built already a grand edifice of fancy for himself; and here sat old Samuel, with his cowering face half turned upwards towards him, inexorably, with infinite dexterity, pulling it down about his ears; and yet reminding him that he still held in his hand the power of rebuilding it in one instant. He began to get very unhappy. Samuel saw that he was producing an effect, and changed his tune with infinite knowledge of his man.

"But don't let us talk any more of this. There 's a bright future before you; and, if Mr. Erne is alive, you may make it up to him."

"Is he alive, or is he not?" said Reuben impatiently. "One time you say one thing, and at another time another."

"He is alive sure enough," said Samuel. "But listen to me. Do you know all the pleasures of ten thousand a year, lad? Have you ever thought of them? Have you ever thought of what you are giving up? Why, your position, in case of your not making a fool of yourself, will be one of the most enviable in the whole world. Think of what it is to be a country gentleman, and how well you are suited for it. There 's your horses and dogs now; and what 's to prevent your taking the Vine hounds into your own hands, declining subscriptions, and making

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a king of yourself? Or your horses, once more! Is there anything against Sir Reuben Hillyar owning a Dutchman or a Voltigeur, having his share in the maddest five minutes of the year, — ay, and coming out the envied of England? Boy, boy! you have heard them coming over the grass, four or five of them together, so close that you might lay a table-cloth over them. You know that maddening music, do you? Why, I am an old man, but it sends the blood buzzing and tingling into my ears even now when I think of it. Don't say I have n't hit you there; for I saw your eye kindle; you are a born sportsman. And Morton says you are shooting beautifully. Ah, dear! those woodcocks in the hollies: it takes a man for them."

Reuben said, "Well; have you done?"

"The girls, the lasses, the ladies, hey," continued old Samuel, as though he had n't heard him. "The real ladies. The carefully educated women, ugly or pretty, — the women formed by the traditions of a dozen generations of refinement. You fool; do you know what you are throwing away by cutting yourself off from all hopes of coming near *them*? I do. I was brought up among them, and used to watch their ways; and the recollection of them used to make the hulks, and the prison, and the wretched pot-house life into which I was driven, a hell to me; for *I* was born for a gentleman. Have n't I waited on them; and don't I know how the very plainest of them gets, from the very air in which she lives, a grace and a refinement, — a power of fascination which no girl in our rank of life can even understand? I know this; and you ——"

Reuben rose. "How many of them are like Emma Burton?" he said. "How many of them would have followed me to the den to which you led me, and have saved me at the risk of her life? *She* is my model of a woman, and I want none better. She always led me from evil, and showed me good. If Erne is dead, my life and fortune shall be devoted to taking his place, so help me God. She may forget him in time; and I may grow worthy of her in time. It is that glorious girl's influence," continued he, snarling in his speech, as his cockney, *poco curante* etiquette broke down under stress of circumstances, "that enables me to tell you that what you wish me to do is impossible, for that, if I did it, I should never dare to look upon her face again."

They spoke no more together. Before the silence had become awkward, Mr. Compton's voice was heard outside, inquiring for Sir Reuben Hillyar. Reuben went out to him, and taking the will from his breast-pocket, held it out to him, smiling.

"Do you know this paper?" he said.

"Good God!" said Compton. "It is your grandfather's will.

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I know it well enough, for I drew it up. It is the will that could n't be found. How on earth did *you* come by it? You must have stronger faith in Erne's death than I have, from that miserable old liar's account, or you would have put it in the fire. Where on earth has it been?"

"It has been on its travels," said Sir Reuben, pointing over his shoulder towards the room where Samuel Burton still sat. "Lady Hillyar's liver-and-tan spaniel found it on the floor, and seeing it smelt meaty, being parchment, began gnawing it; when in came her ladyship's white Persian cat, with her three white kittens, wanting some of it, considering as a mother of three that the assertion of her rights was a sacred duty. And the dog, conceiving them, from their color and from the solemnity of their demeanor, to be avenging angels, hooked it up the chimney, and shut the register after him, having forgotten, in his guilty terror, to let go of the will."

"My dear Sir Reuben!" put in Mr. Compton.

"And," continued Reuben, determined to atone for his late exhibition of earnestness by going into higher flights of nonsense than he had ever attempted heretofore, and rising to the circumstances, "that dog remained in that chimney for four days, sometimes trying to get out at the top, from which he was prevented by the cowl; sometimes attempting, with a perseverance and an intelligence to which the attention of writers on the natural history of the friend of man cannot be called too soon, to raise the register with his fore feet. During all this time the dog, whether terrified by his position, or (as seems more probable) beginning to feel a natural remorse at having abstracted ——"

"Now steady, my dear Sir Reuben," put in Mr. Compton. "Never mind where this will has been. We have got it now. That is all."

"Say no more about it," said Reuben. "I will tell you, when it is safe to do so, the story about it. Meanwhile, if it is good in law, let it take effect. If Erne is dead, I will devote half my life to win Emma Burton."

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CHAPTER LXXI.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY.

And so poor Erne was dead! Noble, affectionate Erne Hillyar, who had lit down among all the commonplace squalor of Chelsea, and had made friends with me above all other lads, and had taught me to love him also, he was dead. The fate which seemed to hang over the two houses whenever they were brought together had stooped down once more. He had fallen in love with my sister; and she, refusing him through a foolish overstrained sense of duty, had made him desperate, and he had gone south, and was dead.

I was not angry with her about it. I thank God now that I never blamed her; I loved her too well for that, and I felt, I think, in a less degree, every arrow of grief which went through her heart. When, after the third day, she fled to me — to me of all others — for comfort, I took her to my heart, and felt something like a gleam of sunshine. Though I had persuaded her, almost bullied her to forego her silly resolution, yet she loved me above all others yet. I knew that she did not fly to me because I had loved him who was dead best of living men, and was the more likely to talk of him. I was quite sure of that, and I think I am so now. No: on consideration I am certain she came to me because she loved me for my own sake, better than all the world, now that he was gone.

In the old days when I used to go courting Martha by Clerkenwell Prison, where we used to get the omnibus and go out to Hampstead Heath and wander all day, hand-in-hand, among the furze-bushes, until the time came for her to go back to her hideous drudgery, we two intensely-happy fools used to talk about this Erne Hillyar, until Martha believed in him like a god. She believed in me to an immense extent, and does so still, I think. I think that at this very time she has a lurking belief that I not only found the copper-mine, but made the copper and put it there ready to be found, and that consequently she looks on the copper-works as a triumph of sagacity on her part, in having selected me to keep company with in the old times when I was only a blacksmith's apprentice. She believed in Erne, from my account of him, as some one who moved in a higher sphere than ours, possessed of qualities to which we could never attain. Her mother had taught her, either before her Catechism, or else with such

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remarkable emphasis, that the Catechism sank into insignificance, that gentlemen were wolves and scoundrels, and that she was never to say anything more to a gentleman than yes or no. But she had never considered Erne to be a gentleman. She went about with me during our courtship on that very question. "You profess to love him," she said, "and call him *that*." I was obliged to keep the fact of Saint Erne being a gentleman in the background.

When that pretty cracked little Lady Hillyar came wandering to our house, asking to be taken care of, Emma brightened up a little, and accepted her work cheerfully; she went south again and left me alone in my grief. I say comparatively alone, for I think that my wife's grief was mainly for me; and I tried to hide it from her as much as possible. I could not bear the anxious look that came in that dear face when she saw me moping and brooding, or those pitiful offerings up of the baby, to be kissed, at the shrine of her love. Dear soul, she did not know what to say to comfort me; but she had found the baby a sovereign remedy for every small vexation in her own case, and so she used to administer it to me whenever my head went down upon my hands, and my face grew vacant as my mind wandered off after what might have been. Baby was very well for a few minutes; but it was too young to talk, and was generally given back to its mother, who stood with anxious eyes watching the father's face. God bless thee, wife! Summer and winter come and go; the storm rattles over head, and goes crashing and booming away towards the mountains, and leaves a sky of cloudless blue behind it from horizon to zenith; but thy love has never waxed or waned, — neither in gingham and woollen, nor, as we are now, in brocade and diamonds.

I suspect that, if I had n't been brought up a blacksmith, I should have been something else, provided I had brains enough; on which last point I am not sure, but on which my family seemed to have satisfied themselves in the negative; though why they always come to me about all questions, which any brains of a better quality than those of a —— well —— could have settled in a moment, I am at a loss to conceive. I suspect also that there is some of the poetical faculty about me (hitherto strictly latent), because I am accustomed to walk out of nights, when anything goes wrong.

I took to doing this now, because I was in really deep distress about Erne, and because I found that these long night-walks made me sleep soundly, until the time came for me to get up and go to the mine. Men at twenty-one can do with wonderfully little sleep, and an amazing deal of work. You see there is so much more phosphorus in the brain then, or something of that kind.

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And again, although I had intended these night-walks of mine to be solitary walks in which I might think over the memory of him who was gone, yet it was, perhaps, fortunate for me that my humor was not allowed to have its course. I soon had a companion.

Trevittick was a man who scorned to do anything like any one else, and he kept up his character on this occasion. Knowing what an affectionate nature he really had beneath his quaint shell, and knowing how deeply he had attached himself to poor Tom Williams, I dreaded the burst of grief which would ensue when he heard of his death, not only on account of his loss here, but because I felt sure that Trevittick would, like a thorough Heautontimoroumenos, torture himself with some insane speculation on the probable destiny of poor Tom's soul. What was my astonishment at his receiving the news with a burst of thanksgiving, and at his going about his work that day with an air of pious cheerfulness. I really did not know whether to laugh, or to be provoked at, this new vagary of his. But, in the evening, my curiosity to know in what way he would account for his conduct, in what light he would put the matter before his strangely-distorted mind, overcame my manners, and I asked him to explain.

He scornfully doubted if a person so dead to higher religious life as I, was capable of understanding his explanation.

I simply said I would try.

He then said that he had every reason to believe that Tom, though unawakened, was elect; that the elect who died before their awakening, entered into glory, into a higher destiny than was possible for us; for they were awakened in bliss unutterable, whereas we must wait and wander, and fall and rise, and only afar off ——

Here the poor fellow completely broke down. The outward exhibition of his grief was as wild and fierce as his self-command had been wonderful. It was a long time before that powerful mouth could set itself once more, still longer before I ceased to detect a fluttering of the lip when he spoke.

He was very angry with himself and with me about this outbreak. On the very next occasion, which occurred immediately, he "gave it to me" in right good earnest. I, speaking from my heart, and thinking in some way to comfort him, said, —

"Poor Tom Williams! — poor dear Tom!"

He fired up immediately. He said I was blaspheming, to apply the epithet "poor" to a saint in glory. He said I was as bad as a miserable idiot of an old woman at a funeral, who in one breath would speak of the deceased as being happy in heaven, and in the next would "poor dear" him and begin howling. I took his rebuke in my usual ox-like manner, and, moreover, did

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not laugh, — which I somehow felt inclined to do, — at the quaint mixture of sentimentality, shame of that sentimentality, fanaticism, and logical thought which he showed; and which, combined with extravagance and avarice in about equal portions, and a "clannishness" — a belief in Cornwall and things Cornish — before which the Scotticism of Professor Blackie shows like a feeble, half-developed instinct, make up the character of that strange race who live beyond the Tamar, and many of whom are about as much like Englishmen as the Samoeydes.

I only went for one walk alone, and then he found me out. The next time I started he was waiting for me, and I was glad of his company, for the weather was deadly still, dull, and sultry, and there was no movement in the forest; except sometimes the distant crack and crash of a falling bough; and now and then, while the blood-red moon hung overhead, the wild wail of a native dog, like the feeble cry of a dying child; which faded away into silence, and left the hot oppressiveness of the forest more unbearable than before. It was not well to walk alone in the forest at midnight that summer.

We never made any arrangement as to where we should walk; but our feet, by some tacit, unexpressed instinct, always carried us the same way, almost to the same spot, — southward, to the summit of the Cape Wilberforce Mountain, where we could look over the sleeping forest, stretched out beneath the lurid moon, towards Victoria, the land where our unburied loved ones lay dead.

I used to talk but little. I was unable, either by education or intellect, to hold my own with Trevittick in argument. He alone talked. He talked to me a great deal, but I soon found that he was talking to himself, — was using me as a "Speaker," as a man set there for him to put his cases to, like the personages in Plato's dialogues, put up to be demolished; as a man to whom he might, without personality, vent his strange theories about God's dealings with man, — theories got principally from the Old Testament, which he had, as it were, eaten raw, without any salt of scholastic divinity whatever, and which had consequently disagreed with him terribly, and sometimes nearly driven him mad. In some of his moods he would claim that there was a higher law, which we were incapable of understanding, — a law which set aside our notions of human morality; in another, that the deepest and most subtle lesson which the Old Testament taught was that morality was unnecessary to understanding God, which was the only object of life: nay, more, that it was a stumbling-block set before our feet by the fiend. This he would illustrate by such questions as that of the assassination of tyrants; in such a temper, too, as made me feel certain that, if

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Cardinal Wiseman ever did preach in Westminster Abbey, and Trevittick happened to be among the congregation, his Eminence would meet with an accident, and one of the best preachers in England would preach no more. At another time maintaining, and uncommonly well, that the right of taking human life was taken from man the morning when Christ was born. Such a mass of rambling, confused thought was never yet put before a half-educated man as Trevittick put before me during these midnight walks; and the man was so clever, and so amazingly eloquent too, that he dragged me triumphantly at the wheels of his chariot, and fully persuaded me of each of his theories in succession; until, sometimes, coming home in the morning, as the ghastly red sun had risen, and left the moon hanging overhead with a sickly, pale face, as of an obstinate ghost who had refused to depart at cockcrow, I used to deliberate whether or no Baby himself, lying with his tender fingers tangled in my wife's hair, was not an invention of the fiend, sent to lure me to my destruction.

Heaven defend me from having that Weather and that Man sent to me at the same time again! I should go mad. I could possibly, having the constitution of an ox, pull through either separately; but both together. Bah! I can make no more fun for you, reader. If you want any more of that, shut up the book here, and say good-bye. But these midnight walks with him had a strange, unhealthy fascination for me in my present state of mind; and I continued them.

One night we sat together on the summit of the mountain. The stillness had grown stiller, and the heat had got more intense; the blessed sea itself, the fresh, restless, changing sea, was now merely a dull gleaming sheet of copper beneath the blurred and ragged moon; there was no sound in the long-spread forest, for the rivers were silent in the horrible unnatural heat, and the native dogs were crouched in their lair, urged by an instinct of fear more delicate than our own.

We sat on the grass with our hats off, and our throats bare, for some time without speaking; at last I said, —

"After all you have said on both sides, Trevittick, you have left me with a confused idea that there is some injustice in the death of Erne and Tom Williams. They were so good and so innocent. What had they done to deserve such a horrible fate?"

We sat without speaking for some time after this. I knew I had offended Trevittick. For him to find all his high-wrought teaching traversed by a commonplace remark of this kind would, I knew, make him angry. But, God forgive me, I felt what I said. It did seem to me so very, very hard.

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I cannot say how long the silence lasted, but suddenly we moved closer together, and tried to seize one another's hands in the dark. For down in the south, among the dim, still forest ranges, we heard the first low muttering of an approaching earthquake.

The sound of it changed from a dull muttering into an angry snarl, and then into a confused jarring roar; but, before it reached us, it had passed into silence, and had only left strange humming echoes in the hot heavy air. The vast mass of trap rock on which we sat, crossing the crack in the earth at right angles, had stopped it. We looked hurriedly towards Port Romilly; the ramparts of Cape Wilberforce had saved the town. The few lights burning burnt as steadily as ever.

After a time Trevittick spoke. "The heathenish nonsense you were talking," he said, "before the Lord rebuked you by shaking the solid earth under your feet, arises from this error, — that the world is the place of rewards and punishments. That is a lie of the Devil's. If you believe that, you cannot at the same time believe in the justice of God. You have seen one instance in proof of it, and have rebelled against that. Mind lest God send you another and more terrible one."

I remembered his words afterwards.

"The best man ever I knew was burnt to death, and died in horrible agonies, trying to save a widow's house. You lay *that* to your *heart;* else when the time comes you will most bitterly repent it."

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE OMEO DISASTER.

Poor Erne! His troubles had very quickly begun. By the time he reached the lake, he was quite blind with sand blight, and unable to do anything. It was only by degrees that the light broke in upon him, and then the blazing of the great sheets of snow which hung in horizontal lines, or rolled up into gentle curves, round three quarters of the horizon, made him fain to shut them again.

He found that busy Tom Williams had pitched their tent in the deep shade of a group of lightwood trees, on a rising ground overlooking the lake, which began about a hundred and fifty yards from them, and stretched away for five-and-twenty miles

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through the beautiful broken country of intermingled forest and lawn, hill and valley which surrounded it. Around on all sides were dark forest-clad mountain ramparts, and above it all the aërial snow downs, traversed continually with purple shadows of flying summer clouds.

Here they stayed and worked pleasantly enough for a long while. There was gold about in all directions, very fine, but tolerably abundant. They put up troughs on a little stream of water and washed the earth; it was pleasant cool work, by no means laborious.

There were but few incidents. It got to be a habit with them to watch the snow. To Tom Williams it would have been snow only; nay, less than snow, only white hills, had he not been with Erne. To the last, I believe, his London *nil admirari* mind hardly appreciated the fact of its really being real cold snow. But there were white hills, and Erne said they were snow, and showed him the beauty of them. Tom noticed that at evening, when the glaring white had turned to a blazing crimson which Mr. Sidney Percy himself could scarcely paint, the light of it was reflected in Erne's face, as he sat in the door of the tent, and gave it an artificial flush. And Tom noticed too that, when some travelling thunder-storm would rise up, like the eruption of a volcano, violet-black, out of Gippsland, enfold the side of one of the snow downs, and begin tearing at it with continuous snatching claws of lightning, then Erne's face would light up once more, his big eyes would stare, and his handsome mouth would open, — only for a time though, Tom was sorry to see. When the thunder-storm had gone rattling away southward, or when the south wind had come rushing up in his strength, and after a few feeble thunder crackles had dissolved the whole terrible and dangerous combination into thin air, till only one pinnacle of the great ruin hung floating in the sky, disappearing while you looked on it, — then Tom Williams noticed that the old weary look came back into Erne's face, and the eyelids would half close over the eyes, and the mouth would shut once more.

Of course Erne was not long before he made a confidant of Tom Williams. It might be indiscreet; but then Tom Williams knew the whole business from beginning to end, and had known it a long time before Erne ever opened his mouth. It is very quaint, the way "the principal party" comes and solemnly tells you in a whisper, with suspicious glances at the door, what one heard a moiety of the assembled county discuss and shelve, at the Pacha's dinner-table, a week agone last Friday. However, Tom Williams heard the story all over again very many times with the most extreme complacency. "*Toujours perdrix*" is no motto for children or sailors, or the majority of the laboring

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class. "Let us have 'Little Red Ridinghood' to-night, Miss Piminy," or "Pitch us that yarn about the young man as cut the young woman's throat and buried her in the sawpit," is the sort of demand generally made on the story-teller of the evening in the nursery, the forecastle, or the public-house. New stories require frequent repetition to give them the stamp of authenticity. And the "child-mind" is eminently Tory, and suspicious of all fiddle-faddle not believed in by their grandmothers, unless, as in a few instances, it runs into a kind of rampant fiendish whiggery, and asks questions, in which case it must be slapped and put to bed, or the very thunders of Convocation themselves will pass overhead as idle words. Tom Williams was not in the least bored by hearing what he had heard fifty times before. I remember that, as children, we used to demand every night for a long period, at Dieppe, the history of the young lady who used to lose her temper at dominos.

Erne was passionately fond of shooting, and with a view to sport had brought up a large store of gunpowder. All the week they would work, and on Sunday would be away in the forest, or round the lake, shooting,* getting quantities of wild duck, snipe, quail, and plover. And so the time passed away pleasantly enough, and they got no richer and no poorer, and they were never much too cold or much too hot; and the sun rose and set, and northed in the winter, and came south again in summer, and all things went so smooth and easy that months seemed like years, and Erne began to feel as though there were no real world beyond these snow-downs. There had been once, but there was none now. His reason told him that all his old friends were alive and well; yet in his memory the image of James Burton was scarcely more distinct than that of his father. Emma stood by herself still. His intellect would have gone nearly to sleep had it not been for occasional fierce fits of furious jealousy against some unknown man or another, who might be in her company at Palmerston.

Nearly everybody left the place once, to go to Reid's Creek, some 160 miles off, where gold was being found in amazing abundance. There were hardly a hundred people left, and they had such a queer, quiet time of it. Mails were few and far between, and newspapers consequently irregular. The little colony was thrown upon its own resources, and managed wonderfully well. Every one knew every one else, and all called one another by their Christian names. The ladies had their little tiffs. Somes's wife fell out with Homes's wife about Erne's washing, for in-

* What an extraordinary fiction it is, that there is no sporting in Australia! The sport there is far better than any which was obtained by Mr. Grantley Berkeley in America, if you leave out his buffalo-shooting.

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stance; for after their dissolution of partnership, Erne being unable, like St. What's-his-name, to divide his one shirt a week between them, tossed up a shilling and gave it to Mrs. Somes; whereupon Mrs. Homes accused her of soda, and even their husbands did not speak for a fortnight. And sometimes, too, a couple of dogs would fall out; but the general unanimity was wonderful.

This agreeable state of things was rudely disturbed by Tom Williams and Erne. They moved a small granite boulder in the channel of the stream, where they were working, and found in a crevice below about three handfuls of black sand, out of which they washed a pound weight of gold. The news reached Beechworth, of course, in an exaggerated form, and the consequence was that diggers came flocking over in hundreds.

The approaches to Lake Omeo are of fearful difficulty. The men came on foot or horseback, but the approach with drays in this burning summer time was exceedingly difficult; the men were there before the provisions, and the consequence was a disastrous retreat, in which the loss of life must have been very great. How great it was we shall never know, but it must have been very great. A man who came into Beechworth on Christmas eve informed me that he himself had found eight young men dead by the Mitta Mitta.

Just as the panic began Erne fell ill. They had no immediate cause for alarm at first, having a considerable quantity of stores by them; but Erne's illness grew so obstinate that Tom Williams began to get anxious. He never thought of himself. If any one had spoken to him about deserting Erne, Tom would have "pitched into him." He was perfectly willing to stay there and die with Erne, but he was getting anxious, more for Erne's sake than his own. What strange tales one reads of the devotion of men towards one another at such times as these. Read the history of Burke and Wills's expedition. When you read of Wills (last and not least of Devon's worthies) dismissing Burke and King, lest they should lose their lives in seeing him die, — when you find that Wills sent these two men from him, and chose a hideous, lonely death, sooner than keep them by him till their last hope of safety was cut off, — then you get into a clear high atmosphere of tragedy.

Tom Williams stayed by Erne, patient, gentle, and careful to the last, — believing that in doing so he was cutting off his only hope of safety. He saw their provisions dwindling day by day; he saw Erne getting weaker day by day; but he sat on and talked cheerfully about old times and people, and he talked the more about them because he began to be fully persuaded that he should never see them again. Erne's beautiful temper made it easier for him; but to sit all day in a scorching tent, as the summer set-

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tled down over the land like a furnace, watching starvation stalking on toward you, — this was a hard fate for one who was only there by an act of unselfish devotion.

One afternoon Tom, who had not left Erne before that day, went out to talk to one of the few neighbors who were left. Their tents were mostly standing, and he looked into one after another. There was nobody in any one of them. The place was quite silent. He began to feel like a child in a dark room, — he began to feel the awful terror of solitude, the terror which expresses itself by hurried glances over the shoulder. He shouted aloud, but the echo of his voice came rattling back to him from among the tree stems. There was no other answer, not even the bark of a dog. The last of the men had gone, and the dogs had followed them; and poor dying Erne and he were left alone together by the solitary lake, three thousand feet above the sea, and one hundred and sixty miles from the voices of their fellow-men.

Erne had one priceless treasure. He had his "In Memoriam." And, although he knew most of it by heart, yet he loved to see the glorious words on the page, for old fellowship's sake; for they were dear to him. One night he fell asleep while he was reading it, and, when Tom awoke, he saw that Erne was awake too, and reading again.

"Tom," he said; "I dreamt of my mother last night."

Tom bowed his face in his hands.

"You know what that means?"

Tom knew too well, but said nothing.

"I must die, you see. There is no doubt about it. Now you must make me one solemn promise."

Tom promised him.

"You must take the gun and powder and shot, and try to make Snake Valley. You must leave me."

Tom swore a great oath, which he had no business to do; but then he was a low born, ignorant fellow.

"You promise," said Erne.

"And I'm going to break my promise. Let's hear no more about it. You are insulting me."

That weary day passed on, and Erne seemed no worse. Just at sunset there came towards the tent, a very wan, lean, wizened little old man, all alone.

"Why, daddy," exclaimed Tom Williams, "We thought you was gone! Where have you been this week?"

"I've been down with the old complaint, and, Lord bless you, I was all alone, and near dying, for I could'nt find my remedy.* And I lay a week, and was just giving up yesterday when I be-

* Probably opium and catechu.

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thought me it might have dropped behind the bed. And, praise God, there it was, and I am all right this morning, but dreadful weak. Where's the young gentleman?"

"The young gentleman's down with the same complaint. And God help me," said Tom, with the first burst of tears he had hitherto indulged in, "he 's dying!"

"What have you give him?"

"I have n't had anything to give him. Nothing 's any good now."

The old man made a gesture of impatience. "Cut away to my tent," he said, "for your legs are nimbler than mine; and look under the head of my bed-place, and you will find an old galvanized iron bucket. And at the top of the bucket you will find a lot of *Melbourne Arguses*, and a pair of gold scales; and take them out careful. And below that you will find a parcel done up in a Sacramento paper; you need n't open that, there 's naught in it but a quartz specimen and a Arrapahoe scalp, as I give six dollars for to one of the pony express; but take it out careful. And then you 'll come to a old Bible, and leave that out, young man, for I want it again: I mind of its being uncommon useful twenty-two year agone. And below the Bible you 'll find a cigar-box; and open that and you 'll find a lock of woman's hair done up in a blue ribbon, and a lock of boy's hair done up in brown ribbon. The woman's hair is black, and the boy's hair is brown, though that ain't no odds to you, by the bye. But in that same box you will find a paper parcel, and bring it here. The reason I put it there was that I could n't die without looking into that box, and so the remedy was better there than elsewhere. Bring it here, but don't go no deeper into that bucket. There 's nothing but a lot of ballads and love-letters below that."

How quaint that Australian life is, — a life's history in an old iron bucket! Not always, however, with another life at the bottom of the bucket, as there was in this case.

The good old man, having ascertained that the worst symptoms had not made their appearance, "exhibited" his remedy, and the symptoms ceased in five hours. There were sufficient provisions left to put Erne on his legs again, and Tom Williams one morning found that an angel, named Hope, had lit down out of the blazing, brazen sky, and was standing before him with sheeny wings, beckoning westward.

There was something utterly unspeakable in the joy that this young workhouse-bred nobleman felt, when he saw Erne take his gun out and shoot a wood-duck. Hope dawned upon him once more. His self-sacrifice had not been in vain. Here in this scorching, beautiful paradise was death. Beyond, lay sweetheart, friends, and life. Only a hundred and sixty miles between them and

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Beechworth. Even if he had to carry Erne on his back they *might* do it. They had twelve pounds of flour, some tea, and heaps of powder and shot. Oh for Reuben Burton now! or one of the Shepherds, or one of the Homeses!

As they crossed the great wooded ridge which divided them from the watershed of the Mitta Mitta, they turned and had a last look at the place where they had suffered so much, and which they were never to see again. The lake lay sleeping in the inexorable heat, sometimes dreaming in a fantastic mirage, like a nightmare, in which the trees and mountains were horribly inverted. All around, the great snow hills folded in vast ridges; and there was but one living thing in sight. The old man, a mere speck in the vast scenery which seemed rolling in on all sides in towering white waves to overwhelm him, — he stood there, poor, weak, feeble, alone; with all the powers of untamed Nature banded against him, solitary among the dreadful mountains.

That was the last of Lake Omeo. That scene photographed itself upon their brains indelibly.

At first, while the new effect of effort and freedom was upon them, they never doubted of the result: they imagined themselves saved. They shot parrots and cooked them, and fared very well. But the ridges were steep to climb, and Erne began to flag; and, when they got into the magnesian limestone country, which lies on the left bank of the Mitta Mitta, the water, drawn away underground into infinite crannies and clefts of the rock, begun to fail them; and they were forced, will they nill they, to struggle down over the cliffs to the river itself, and fight with the tangled jungle on its brink for very life's sake, sooner than keep the high open leading ranges where walking was so much easier, and where the blessed cool south wind from the pole could fan their foreheads, and tell them that the whole of God's earth was not like this blazing, beautiful, cruel forest land through which they fought their way.

Similar causes will produce similar effects; and they, starting with just the same knowledge or ignorance of the route to Beechworth as those who had preceded them, found after a little time that they, driven by the same necessities, had too surely followed on their track.

> "The bodies and the bones of those
> That strove in other days to pass,
> Are withered in the thorny close
> Or scattered blanching on the grass.
> He gazes on the silent dead ——"

Those who try to prove that Shakespeare was an attorney, had better try to prove that Mr. Tennyson brought up the rear of the great Omeo retreat. There is more evidence for Tennyson than for Shakespeare.

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One day — who can say which, out of so many weary days? — they came upon the bodies of two young men, brothers, whom they had known on the Omeo, lying locked in one another's arms, on a shelf of limestone by the river. They could not go near them, but they recognized them by their clothes. Erne spoke very little after this, and soon after went mad.

He was not morose or troublesome in his madness. He got first incoherent in his talk, and was apt to astonish Tom Williams by tacking one sentence on to another without the slightest notion of cause and effect. But after this his madness began to get really pretty. He began to be really delirious, — that is to say, he began to dream without going to sleep, and to tell his dreams as fast as they came, — a very great advantage; for we sane idiots forget half ours as soon as we wake. In short, Erne was talking his dreams as quick as they appeared, and, had there only been a short-hand writer present, we might have had the most wonderful results.

In spite of his madness, though, he walked stoutly onwards. The country through which they walked was one of the richest and most beautiful in the world, but it was not ready for human habitation. It was still in its cruel, pitiless phase. It was only in the state of preparation, — a state which it requires generally a great sacrifice of human life to alter into a state of readiness for what we choose to call a state of civilization. It was exceedingly rich, and it looked wonderfully beautiful. Every morning, great inexorable Mother Nature looked over the eastern hill tops, passing through phases of crimson glory into orange glory, until she had done her day's work, and laid all the magnificent landscape to sleep, under a haze of crystalline blue. And then she would sleep herself; and say, dreamily, "Children! children! here is room for millions of you. Come." And then in the evening she would wake up once more, into new glories of crimson and purple, and once more fall asleep into dark night, sighing sometimes, in dry wandering winds, which rustled through the grass upon the thirsty wolds, "Children! children! you have come too soon, and you must die."

The owner of a solitary tent, in one of the furthest and loneliest gullies at Snake Valley, was lying reading in bed, when he was startled by a shout, to which he answered by another, and an invitation to enter. In a moment a young man stood in the doorway, looking so wan and so wild that the man was startled, and cried out, "Good God, mate, what 's the matter?"

"Omeo! water!" was all that Tom Williams could get out. The man was out of bed in a moment, and instantly was making towards the water-bucket with a pannikin; but, as Tom's wolfish eyes followed him, and saw where the water was, he dashed past

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him, and, with his head in the bucket, drank with long draughts like a horse.

After a fit of giddiness and sickness, he found his voice. "My mate is not three hundred yards back on the track, and I am not sure that he is dead. I carried him the last mile, and laid him down when I saw your light; come, and ——" But the man was gone, and, when Tom came up, he found him trying to pour water between the lips of the unfortunate Erne, who lay beneath the tree where Tom had left him, — to all appearance dead.

Dead he was not, though, thanks to Tom Williams. Some may say that death is better than life, on the terms on which Erne enjoyed it for a long time after. But life is life, with all its troubles, and death is practically considered by all parties, creeds, and ages, to be a change for the worse; so I suppose that, "humanly speaking," we ought to congratulate ourselves on the fact that Erne Hillyar was n't dead, and is not dead yet. He had only succeeded in utterly destroying his constitution.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

Three nights after the earthquake we were in the same place, at the same hour. The lurid, still weather was the same as before. The terrible threatening silence which hung over the country remained the same. It seemed to me on this night as if that silence would only be broken by the trump of the resurrection, and I said so to Trevittick.

He took my remark quite *au grand sérieux*, but considered it improbable that the day was near: first, because we had seen no portents, — nothing but the earthquake and the heat; and next, that he thought it improbable that he would be allowed to reform Tom Williams so quickly; his earthly heart had not been sufficiently weaned from him.

We sat a long time, sometimes talking, sometimes in silence, until I heard a distant sound in the forest, to the south, and called Trevittick's attention to it. He said: "I have heard it a long time. There are two men walking, and one is lame."

I had as yet made out nothing more than a rustling in the grass, and every now and then the snapping of a stick; but soon I distinguished that two persons were coming through the wood towards us, up hill.

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My nerves were unhinged a little by what had happened lately, a little more so by the time and place, and more yet by the awful weather. The moon, though of a ghastly red, shed light enough to distinguish surrounding objects distinctly; and I had a nervous terror of the time when the men who approached should come into the range of sight. I had grown afraid of my own shadow. Trevittick might have had strength of mind to live in the atmosphere of terror which he had created for himself without going mad. I most certainly had not.

I listened with fear as the footsteps approached; and suddenly, before those who made them were in sight, the whole forest echoed with my shout. It was no articulate sound I uttered; it was something like Hah! or Here! The forest took up the echoes and prolonged them, and then silence reigned again. The footsteps had ceased.

"What on earth did you do that for?" said Trevittick.

"You heard the footsteps before me, but I knew the voice before you. Did you hear him?"

"I heard a man speak," said Trevittick.

"As I am to be saved by no merits of my own," I said eagerly, "I heard Erne Hillyar's voice. What fools we are. We are on the very bush-track by which Lady Hillyar came from Melbourne. It must be them; it shall be them!" I cried, raising my voice. "Erne! Erne! it is I."

It *was* them. There was a feeble shout from below, and we ran down. Before I knew rightly whether my supposition was true or false, I was holding a tall, lean, wan, wasted skeleton of a young man in my arms, and peering into his face. The great blue-black eyes were luminous even in the light of this horrid Hecate of a moon, and the smile was there still. Ah me! yes, it was Erne in the flesh.

What Trevittick did to Tom Williams I don't know. Punched his head, possibly, for upsetting by his return a dozen or fourteen as pretty theories about the future of the departed, as Mr. Emerson and Copeland Advocate, with Dick Swiveller to help them, could have made up in a summer's day. He has never spoken to me on religious subjects since. He had laid his proud heart too bare before me during our solitary walks, when we shared a causeless grief, ever to open it again. But among all that man's wild feelings in the dark, among all his honest stumblings in the search of truth, one thing he said remains with me yet, and will remain with me until a light not of this world dawns upon my eyes:—

"This world is no place of rewards and punishments. You have seen one instance in proof of it, and have rebelled against that. Mind lest He send you another and more terrible one."

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CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION SAN FRANCISCO

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE SKY BRIGHTENING.

When the morn dawned, I went and looked at him as he lay asleep. He was a terrible ruin. Try to picture to yourself some young round face as it will be when it is old, and you will find it impossible. Again imagine that you have skipped forty years, and met that face again. Would you know it? I should hardly have known Erne.

We had a very clever doctor in Romilly, a man so clever and so *répandu* in his profession, that I have known him fetched by steamer to Melbourne, in what Miss Burke would call "a hurry," to attend important consultations; his expenses and a handsome fee being promised him, and a total immunity against action in civil process being guaranteed him on the honor of the faculty. He had a sympathy with all his patients, inasmuch as he was a prey to a devouring disease himself: that which has been so oddly named, dipsomania, as if an addiction to stimulants had anything to do with thirst. This doctor, when sober (he used to get sober sometimes, as a dissipation, though it played the deuse with his nerves), was a feeble thing, who used to try to dig in his garden; and was always going to give a lecture; but when d—— Well, he never was the worse for liquor, generally rather the better, — a perfect king. He had attained such a dictatorship in his profession, that his addiction to brandy was looked on as an amiable weakness by the most respectable people. As for the midwives, they none of them felt really safe without Dr. C——. It must not be supposed that the doctor ever got drunk.

Mr. Jeaffreson's charming "Book about Doctors" is incomplete. He should add a chapter on colonial doctors.

I sent for this gentleman to see me, and waited with intense impatience till he came out, for the change in Erne was so great that I had a vague fear that he would not live. The weary lassitude, the utter absence of all energy, moral or physical, was so great that I thought it more than probable that he might fail, and die after all.

So I waited for the doctor with great anxiety; and at last he came out. I could gather nothing from his face, and I knew him too well to suppose that I should get anything out of him

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until I had given him his run. I had to sit and wait as patiently as I could to the latest instalment of gossip. But I got him some brandy, hoping that would soften his heart, and persuade him to put me out of my misery. If he should die after having been restored to us. If Emma, after hearing of his life, should hear once more of his death, I feared that she would die too. For many reasons was I anxious.

The doctor began. "Lady and baby quite well, hey? Well done. Now don't begin chaffing about Diver's horse. Don't."

I said I would n't, and I meant it, for I had n't a notion what he meant, saving, that Diver's real name was Morecombe; that there had been a sort of murrain among his uncles and aunts, and that he had gone home, exceedingly drunk, as heir apparent to an earldom.

But the story about Diver's horse struck the doctor as being too good not to be told, and it is not a bad story either, though I am not going to tell it, as did the doctor. The story of Diver's horse led up to the story of Dickenson's aunt, which I shan't tell either, because I have forgotten all about it, but I remember it to have been tragic; and this story led to the story of Dickenson's niece, which was funny; and to that of Horton's brother, which was highly improper. When he had done laughing, I put my question to him most earnestly, and he grew serious at once, and answered me.

"There is great mischief: what we call in our loose language, 'a shock to the system.' There is a nasty tympanitic state of the viscera, arising from starvation, giving rise to very distressing symptoms, which I can mend in a fortnight; but I fear that there is a nervous disorder too, a want of vital energy, which not all the doctors — drunken or teetotal — in Australia could mend if they did their *et cæteraest*, and which I must leave to you, and to some one else, I strongly suspect. I hope there will be no fresh shock or disappointment. If you can, if you love your friend, prevent *that*. He won't *die*, I 'll go bail for it, but, — that man Hillyar has scrofula in his family somewhere."

I eagerly said that such was not the case.

"Pish!" said the doctor. "Don't tell me. Now the muscles of his face are relaxed he shows his teeth like a hare. I say, Burton, have you looked at your barometer?"

"Why?"

"Because mine is drunk."

To get rid of him I took him to see mine in the hall. When he looked at it, he exclaimed, —

"By George, yours is drunk, too! Good-night. Take an old man's advice, and don't whistle for the next fortnight, not even to call your dog, unless you want the shingles about your ears."

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It was but little I cared for barometers that night. I had firm faith in the doctor, (indeed I was right in that,) and it seemed to me that I held Erne's fate in my hand. I sat with him for half an hour, and then left him with a new light in his eyes; for I had told him, in my rough language, that Emma loved him as dearly as ever; that Joe was to be married, and that she considered that another had relieved her of her watch over him; and that, when she had believed him dead, that she had bitterly repented of her treatment of him. She had said to me, I told him, in the silence of the summer's night, —

"My brother, I acted from vanity. Don't raise your hand and say no. Be honest, brother. At first, as a child, I thought I saw my way to what all true women love, — a life of self-sacrifice. But when the necessity for it was gone, as far as regarded our poor deformed brother, the necessity still remained with me; because in my vanity and obstinacy I had *made* it a necessity. I had determined that my life should be sacrificed as a girl; and when as a woman I found that sacrifice unnecessary, I felt, God forgive me, disappointed. I did not sin at first. My sin only began with my obstinacy; when I began to sacrifice his future to my old dream of staying by poor Joe, and taking the place of a wife to him. Until I saw that that dream was nothing but a dream, and that I was unfit for the task I had undertaken, I had not sinned. But now I know my sin. I have driven the best man I have ever met to despair, and I am reaping the fruits of it by Joe's carelessness of me. Oh, if he would come back again, brother! Oh, if he would only come back again!"

The *Wainora* was going south the next day, and I sat up and wrote the following letter: —

"Dearest Sister, — Erne is not dead, but has come back to us, broken in health, but alive.

"I say nothing of a confidence between us two the night before I was married. I say nothing of *that*. I only call your attention to this; your old causes for refusing Erne were these, — that you must sacrifice your life to Joe; and that you would never drag Erne down to your level by marrying him.

"Both these causes are removed. Joe is now one of the leading men in the colony, and is going to marry this beautiful, wealthy Mrs. North. You are now the great Burton heiress, and Erne, a broken man, is lying in my veranda, looking south, towards the sacred land in which you live.

"Surely, dear sister of my heart, your life's work lies here now. I do not urge on you the fact that I know you love him as well as ever, and that I know no one has stepped in between you two. I only say that mere consistency has absolved you

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from your resolution; that from a mere sense of duty you ought to hear him plead once more."

I was on board the *Wainora* early in the morning, with this letter. The commander, Captain Arkwright, was a great friend of mine, and in defiance of Post-office regulations, I entrusted it as a private parcel to his hands. "Give it to her yourself, old fellow," I said, "and get the answer from her. How soon shall you be back?"

"*I'll* give it to her," he said, "and I'll get an answer from her. With regard to being back, why, ten days."

"Ten days, my good sir!" I exclaimed.

"Ah! ten days, my good sir," he answered. "Yes, and eleven with the barometer; all drunk, — aneroid, as well as mercurial. I want sea room, I do; I shall run out pretty nigh to New Caledony, to see the French sogers a-drilling. If I make this port under eastern by south next trip, with this dratted mercury sulking down, by Reid and Maury, I hope I may be made harbor-master of Cape Coast Castle."

He was a good sailor. He was one of those sailors one gets to love by watching them as they, with steadfast faces, hurl their ship through that mad imbroglio which we on shore call a "gale of wind." But he was wrong in this instance. He was back under ten days, and steamed into the bay on a sea so glassy calm, that the ripple of a shark could be seen a mile off, and little following waves, raised by his screw, lived nearly half an hour before they died away upon the face of the waters.

But the melancholy landscape, and the luridly still weather grew bright, fresh, and pleasant to me as I read her letter. There was no barrier between the two, whom, after my wife, I loved best on earth. It was all over now, and a bright, hopeful future in the distance: —

"DEAR BROTHER, — God has been better to me than I deserve. It shall be as he and you wish. If he holds to his mind, let him wait for me in your veranda. If he is not there I shall know that I have tried his patience too long, and shall pray that he will learn to forgive me.

"I will return to you by the *Wainora*. I would have come this trip, but there is sad trouble here, and I am wanted. It is not trouble about Joe, or about any one whom you love, so do not be alarmed. Lady Hillyar is better, and I thought that I was free; but it has pleased God to find me more work. If it had been work which I could have delegated to any one, even to that blessed saint Miss Burke, I would have done so. But it so happens that no one can do it but myself, and the salvation of an im-

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mortal soul is too important a thing to be trifled with. So I have not come this trip, but must wait for the next. I cannot leave my charge until I place her in the hands of my mother.

"May God shower His choicest blessings on all your heads! I hope Fred has not run away from school again. If he has, kiss him for me, and tell him he must not be so naughty. Kiss dear father and mother for me. And so, good-bye, dear brother of my heart; when we next meet, my face will be so radiant with unutterable happiness, that you will scarcely know me. Good-bye."

The *Wainora* went south over the great glassy sea, and we began to watch for her return. From my veranda you could see over the forest, and over the bay as far as Cape Pitt, thirty miles off. We sat down and watched for the smoke of the steamer, whose advent was to bring our life's history to an end, at least as far as concerns speaking of it. The laws of fiction show us clearly and without argument, that a man's life ceases at marriage.

CHAPTER LXXV.

EMMA'S ANGELIC MINISTRATIONS.

THE "Theatre Royal" at Palmerston was a miserable and effete squatiocracy (with their wretched aping of the still more miserable and effete aristocracy of the Old World, as our friend Mr. O'Callaghan chose to call it); the "Opera House" is arranged on strictly democratic principles.

What the actors call in their quaint self-satisfied slang, "the house," as if the normal destination and mission of bricks and mortar was to form the walls of a theatre, was entirely arranged for the comfort of the great unwashed. The galleries contained more than one half of the audience; and, whether the heavy father gave his blessing, the young lady, driven to despair by the unprincipled conduct of the British officer, uttered a touching sentiment. (Said British officer in private life being generally a gentle and kind being, with stores of knowledge about foreign parts, which he is shy of imparting to you for fear of boring you. Mostly having a hobby, such as ornithology or chess. A man who, if he gets to like you, is always preternaturally anxious to introduce you to his mother.) Whether, to resume the thread of this most wonderful sentence, the first tragedian made a point and stopped short and refused to fulfil his engagement, until the audience had

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brought their grovelling souls to appreciate the fact; — whether the villain of the piece, and his more villanous creature, after discharging accusatory sentences at one another, made like pistol shot, suddenly stalked across the stage and changed places (and that is the deepest mystery in theatrical ethics); — whether the first comedy said "Heigh ho" in her lover's absence exactly as we do in private life, or her waiting-maid was "Arch," and took up her apron by the corners, when "rallied" about her *penchant* for the groom; — in short, whatsoever of the old time-honored balderbash done on the stage, was addressed to the galleries.

For the same democratic reasons, the large hall, which formed the crushroom of the theatre, had been erected in it, both on the ground floor, and in the galleries which run round overhead; and this vestibule was not only common to the galleries, which were filled with the lowest population of the town, which were the dregs of the offscourings of Great Britain and Ireland, but also were made by Messrs. Pistol & Co., with the dozen or fourteen gentlewomen from Mrs. Quickly's old establishment, who, having nothing to pay for entrance, and as much to drink as they could get the cattle-dealer and diggers to treat them to, used the hall as a sort of winter-garden, and did so amble and giggle, and mince and flounce, and say things, that the Haymarket at one o'clock in the morning after the Derby was not more hideous and revolting than the hall of the opera house at Palmerston. There is one thing certainly which we of Great Britain, Ireland, and our offshoots and dependencies do in a manner with which no other nation can compete. We exhibit our vice and dissipation with a loathsome indecency which no other group of nations seem to have rivalled. It may be for the best, but it is very nasty.

A little bird has told me that Huskisson Street, Palmerston, and Bourke Street, Melbourne, have been purged with a high hand; though it is still impossible to walk down the Haymarket, — and that the class who have been instrumental in doing this were the class who hissed Lola Montes off the stage at Ballarat, — the respectable mechanics who wished to take Mrs. and Miss Mechanic to hear Catherine Hayes, without having their ears polluted by the abominable language of the Haymarket and Newgate combined. If this be so, which I think highly probable, it is a fact for a certain party, to which they are welcome. If all mechanics were like the Burtons, three cheers for the six-pounders.

But this arrangement prevailed in the time I speak of both at Palmerston and Melbourne. It was difficult for any lady to get to her carriage without being insulted several times; either by a dozen or fourteen gentlewomen, or by that strange young cud in knee-breeches and boots, who carries a whip, but never crossed a

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horse; who, I fancy, is generally some twopenny-halfpenny clerk, who gets himself up like a fancy stork-rider to give himself a brisk flavor. Consequently, when Mrs. Oxton and Emma Burton had stood for a quarter of an hour at the bottom of the staircase which leads down from the dress-boxes, they began to think how they were to get through the disgraceful, drunken crowd before them, and to wish that Mr. Oxton and Joseph Burton, who had promised to come for them, had not been detained so late at the houses; the more particularly as they had brought poor, silly Lady Hillyar out, for the first time, that night; and she, feeling tired, was insisting on sitting on the stairs, and playing draughts on the squares of the oilcloth with the blossoms out of her boquet.

"What shall we do, dear?" said Mrs. Oxton to Emma.

Said Gerty, who was as eminently practical as Mrs. Micawber, the most so when most cracked, "Send the box-keeper to tell them that if they use any more language, we 'll have the triangles out, and give them half a hundred apiece."

Emma did not know what to do just then. She was rather glad of the pause, for she had been crying, and perhaps was quietly crying still. Her brother James's letter, telling her that Erne had come back alive, had not reached her yet. Lady Hillyar was so much better, that she had forgotten her crazy jealousy against her sister and brother-in-law, and had received them with affectionate penitence. So Emma's work was done in that quarter, and her old grief has come on her again, demanding some diversion. Very soon she found such diversion, and cried no more; but now she was low and tearful, for the play, and what followed it, had upset her.

Catherine Hayes had been singing *Norma* so carefully, so diligently, and with such exquisite feeling, that one forgot that there were a few notes of which she was not quite mistress, high up in her glorious gamut. The ill-behaved, ill-educated audience had encored her until she was weary, but she had always come back and had done her best for them, until she was quite weary. When it was all over, they called her before the curtain; but this was not enough for them. She was going to Sydney the next day, and from thence to England, and a loud and universal cry gathered and grew through the theatre, "Last night, Kate! last night! A song! a song!".

In one of the pauses of the clamor a voice was heard, — "One more song for the honor of Old England."

Another voice, which few failed to recognize for that of Mr. O'Callaghan, was heard from pit to gallery, —

"It 's little music of that kind that ye 'll get out of dirthy Ould England. One more song, darlin', for the love of Ould Ireland!"

Whether the old music of her native dialect was too much for

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her, or whether she was a little *tête montée* with the long and enthusiastic applause, we cannot say, but she came before the curtain, and without the orchestra, in her dress as *Norma*, amidst a silence that could be felt, she broke out with the most beautiful, if I may decide, of all Moore's ballads, "The Last Rose of Summer."

Towards the close of each verse, the godlike voice went sweeping through the airy fields of sound like a lark upon the wing, till it paused aloft in a wild melancholy minor, and then came gently down like the weary bird, dropping, tired, sad with too much joy, to his nest amidst the corn.

"You might have heard a pin drop," to use an old figure of speech. Not only did she feel every word of what she was singing, but the hand of death was upon her, and she not only knew it herself, but made her audience, wild and uneducated as they were, understand that she was to be listened to now, not as *Norma* in Italian, but as Catherine Hayes in Irish. She was gone before the applause burst out.

> "The wild swan's death-note took the soul
> Of that waste place with joy."

And Emma, overcome by that strange, wild wail, had hardly recovered herself before she was, with Mrs. Oxton and Lady Hillyar, at the bottom of the stairs. Lady Hillyar, playing chess with flowers, and Mrs. Oxton, saying, "My dear, how ever shall we get to our carriage?"

Something to do. For that quietly diligent soul, anything was better than inaction. Partly from old, old habit, and partly because she had found lately that the old habit of activity and self-sacrifice were the best antidote for sorrow, she had got into the way of doing without hesitation the first thing that presented itself to her hand. It was only forcing her way through a crowd of drunken blackguards just now, but it led to fresh work, heavy work, too, as we shall see.

"I'll go, dear Agnes," she said to Mrs. Oxton; "their language is nothing to me; I was brought up among it. Stay here and watch Gerty, and I will go and see after the carriage."

She drew her opera cloak about her, drew herself up, set her mouth, and launched herself on the sea of low dissipation which lay before her.

The presence of such a proud, imperial figure as this blacksmith's daughter, protesting against these Cornish revels, with her calm, high-bred, beautiful face, and with the atmosphere of purity and goodness, which shone about her head like the glory of a saint, produced an immediate effect, — an effect so great, that had she carried the flaming sword of an angel in her hand, she

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could scarce have made her way more effectually. The men made room for her, and pulled those who had not noticed her approach, out of her way. The prostitutes who were mixed with them stayed their babble and were silent, as she passed down the lane which had been opened for her. Some, with evil, lowering faces, scowled on her, as though they would have said, "You may come to be the same as us, my fine lady, some day, curse you." Some, flippant and silly, were only silent because the others were silent, and wanted to resume their silly tattle, till she had gone by; and some, — ah, the weary day, — felt the blood rush up over their worn, hectic features, and said, "Time was when we might have been as she is; but the grave is cold, and hell is beyond it."

But Emma, passing among these women, seemed to create an atmosphere of silence. She knew the world, she knew how these women lived, and what they were, and her heart was pitiful towards them, and swelled until her great eyes grew larger and prepared themselves for tears. But the tears never came; for before her was a knot of the Devil's tying, which would not untie itself at her mere presence. An imbroglio which had raised the passions of the bystanders from mere prurient frivolity into ferocious attention. There was a crowd which would not dissolve before her, and from the centre of it came the shrill, horrible sound of two desperate women quarrelling.

She caught sight of Miss Burke at the other side of the crowd. She understood in an instant that that most indefatigable of friends had come back to their assistance, and she waved her hand to her, and pointed to the staircase where were Aggy and Gerty: the next moment, by a surge in the crowd, she was thrust near enough to the women who were quarrelling to see the whole thing. For one moment her heart sunk within her, and she grew faint, and tried to turn; but in the next her resolution was taken, and muttering a short prayer to herself, she began to force her way towards the two unfortunate combatants.

"She may be saved yet. Oh God have mercy on her."

She might well say so. In a ring before her; in a ring of faces, — stupid, idle, brutish, curious, cunning, silly, lecherous, devilish, stood Mrs. Clayton, once pretty Polly Martin, once Mrs. Avery; and Mrs. Quickly, face to face at last. Masks torn off, all concealment thrown to the winds, baring the hideousness of their previous lives to the ribald bystander in hot, hissing words, too horrible to be repeated.

They had assaulted one another it seemed, for poor Mrs. Clayton's bonnet was off her head, and her still splendid hair was gradually falling down loop by loop as she shook her head in cursing Mrs. Quickly. As for Mrs. Quickly, not only was her bonnet gone, but her decorous, gray, matronly front, an expensive

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article, manufactured for her own consumption, also; and she stood with her wicked old head nearly bare, and her beautiful long white fingers opening and shutting like a cat's claws.

"Come on," she cried, "you devil. I'm an old woman, but I'm good for a scrimmage with such as you still. Come on."

"Hush! If you want this sort of thing, go to the Haymarket or Whitechapel for yourself. We are going a far different road."

Before Mrs. Quickly had half finished her turn of evil words; before her wicked old tongue had half wearied itself with the outpourings of her wicked old heart, Emma had pushed her way into the circle, had taken Mrs. Clayton round the waist, and had said, "Polly, dear, come home with me"; and the wretched woman had fallen crying on Emma's bosom, and let herself be led away. This was the more easily accomplished, as a singular diversion had been made, and the crowd had been in serious hopes of another row. Mrs. Quickly had found herself suddenly confronted with Miss Burke, who stood grand, majestic, and scornful before her, and who said in a sharp, snarling voice, without one trace of "brogue," —

"Not another word, you wicked old wretch. That woman's sins are known to me and to God; her efforts at repentance are known to me and to God also. And I and God know also how you came between her and salvation. How you wound yourself into her house, held the knowledge of her former life over her head, and drove her once more into her old habits. I think that if I were to tell this crowd the truth, — how in a drunken squabble you laid her whole past life bare before her husband, not because it could do any good, but out of spite, — this crowd, composed of prostitutes and loafers, would tear you to pieces. Get home, you miserable old woman, and try to repent."

Mrs. Quickly undid her gown at the throat, and gasped for breath; then she shook her hands to and fro loosely, as though she was playing the tambourine; clutched her hair wildly, drummed with her heels, bit her fingers, took a short run with her arms over her head, stopped and moaned, took a longer and more frantic run, and hurled herself down in a gutter outside, and then lay there kicking. An unappreciative world this! She was fished out of that gutter as a mere drunken woman by an utterly unsympathetic constabulary, who could not be brought to an appreciation of her wrongs, but took her as a piece of business, — an unexpected order, troublesome to execute and unremunerative, but coming into their weary day's work. A most bitter and hard-hearted world! By the time she had done all this, so well had the retreat been covered by Miss Burke, that Emma had got her unresisting charge safe away, and had very

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soon landed her in her own house. At first Mrs. Clayton only cast herself on the ground, with her face hidden, moaning; but after a time her moans grew articulate, though monotonous. "Let me go and make away with myself! Let me go and make away with myself!"

Emma knelt beside her on the floor, but the poor woman only shrunk from her touch, and went on with the same low wail. At last Emma tried praying, and that quieted her, till by degrees she let Emma's arm steal round her waist, and she laid her burning head upon Emma's bosom, and began in wild starts and with long interruptions to tell her tale.

"She found me out as soon as I married him. I thought that when I married, my whole hideous life was a thing of the past. I did not think how wickedly I was deceiving him. I thought it was all past and gone forever. I had tried so hard, and had repented so sincerely, that I thought some mercy would have been shown me; but when she found me out at the end of the three months, I knew that I was to be punished for my deceit, and that he, poor innocent, — my poor old Jack; my poor, kind, loving, innocent, old Jack; oh, my God! I'll tear the hair out of my head, — that he was to be punished through me. And she tempted me to the drink; and I was glad of it, for I had a horrible life, never knowing what she would say or do. And she would sit opposite me half the day with her arms folded, magging and growling at me, — at me who was always so kind to her, and never offended her; and she would play with my terror as a cat plays with a mouse; and oh! she is a devil! devil! devil!"

"Hush, dear, hush!"

"I used to wish her dead, Emma. I used to wish that I dared murder her; but I saw that servant-girl hung at Bristol, and that stopped me. I tried to keep civil to her, but I could not do it. We had many quarrels, and I knew how dangerous quarrelling was, and vowed each one should be the last. But when the drink was in me I used to break out. And last week we had the finishing quarrel. I broke out at her, and called her such dreadful things that she sat white with savageness, and then got up and went to the room where he was. I saw that she was gone to tell him, but I was too wild to stop her; I threw the worst word of all at her as she went. And then I saw him go riding across the plain with his head bowed down; and then she came back and told me that she had told him, and that he had taken down the Testament and had sworn that he would never, never see me again."

Emma started suddenly, and clenched her hand. It would have been ill for Mrs. Quickly to have seen the look of withering scorn and anger which flashed from her beautiful face as the poor woman spoke that last sentence, but she said not one word.

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"And so I got my horse and rode away here. And she followed me, and I met her again and did not kill her. And she got me to go to where you found me, because she said he was going to the play with another woman. And once I caught her eye, and knew by her wicked leer that she was lying to me about him, and then I fell upon her and tried to tear her treacherous old heart out."

"Hush, dear," said Emma once more. "That woman got you to go to that dreadful place in order to compromise your character again"; and the poor woman grew quieter again.

"And I shall never, never see him any more," she went on moaning; "and I love him, love him with the whole of my rotten heart. And he will shudder when he hears my wretched name. And he loved *me* once. Oh, my God!"

"He loves you still, my poor Mary," said Emma. "That wicked woman has utterly deceived you. Both Miss Burke and I heard from him this morning, begging her, because she is never behind in a good work, and me, because I have known you ever since I was a child, to search you out, and tell you that he forgives you, all, everything, and loves you the same as ever. That he will cherish you through life, and be in the same grave with you in death."

The poor thing only turned over on the ground again, and fell to moaning once more. "Oh, I dare n't look upon his face again. I shall die if he looks at me. Oh, let me go and make away with myself! If you leave me alone, I will go and make away with myself."

So Emma stayed with her; and on the third day, like a great illuminating blaze of lightning, came her brother James's letter. Erne was not dead, and loved her still.

She would have gone to him at once, but the brooding figure before her appealed to her too strongly. She had asked humbly to be taken to Mrs. Burton when she was well enough to move, and prayed Emma not to leave her. She was not safe alone, she said. So that Emma waited for the next voyage of the *Wainora*, as we already know from James Burton's story.

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CHAPTER LXXVI.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: CAPTAIN ARKWRIGHT GOES BACK ONCE MORE.

So the *Wainora* went south again over the calm sea, and Erne and I sat in the veranda, waiting for her return.

"In any other quarter of the world," said Captain Arkwright to me in the billiard-room the night before she sailed, "we should have had a gale of wind after all this brooding weather, and this low mercury. I made sure of it last trip; but since you have told me of this earthquake, which you and Trevittick felt beyond the hill, I am getting less cautious. *That* is what is the matter; that is what is lowering the barometer so, and making this God-forsaken weather. It was just the same at Pernambuco" (he *said* Pernemooker) "five years ago, and at Valparaiso" (he *said* Walloparaiser) "when I was a boy,—the time when I was cook's mate's master's mate in that—never you mind," he went on, a little sulkily, though I had not spoken, "that ain't no odds to you. You was only a smith yourself once, you know. And we must all on us have a beginning, of some sort or another. Even dukes and marquises, as I understand, has to serve their time as earls and barons, and learn their duty, before the Queen will rate them as A. B. By-the-by, did your night-shift in the mine feel it?"

"They *heard* it plain enough," I answered, "and stampeded; but when they came back, the Arndley were all burning, and not so much as a handful of dust had fallen."

"These Australian earthquakes are very partial," said Captain Arkwright; "but law! you don't know what may happen. Well, I'll bring Miss Burton back to you as quick as I can. I like having that woman on board my ship; it is as good as fifty underwritings. I'd go through Torres Straits and chance losing my insurance, if I had her aboard."

"She likes the sea, Skipper," I said; "at least she has taken to like it since she sailed with you."

"Well, now, that's true; though I'm afraid you are learning the bad habits of the upper orders, gentleman Jim, and mean a compliment."

"So I did, Skipper," I retorted. "And if you are going to be nasty about it, you shall have it hot and heavy. I'd sooner sail with you than with any sailor I ever saw. For you are out-and-out the best company,—leave alone the best sailor,—

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and one of the best fellows I ever knew. Now, then. Come. You 've got a deal by growling."

"Shut up! shut up! shut up!" said the Skipper. "I told you you were getting corrupted. But I say, old fellow," he continued, lowering his voice, "tell us, is there anything between her and Mr. Hillyar?"

"She is going to marry him, that is all," I said in a triumphant whisper.

"Hoo-ray!" said the Skipper. "I knew there was some one, from her always staying so late on deck, and watching the coast; and from her standing alone, an hour together, and looking at the engine; and from her beautiful talk to me about the sea-birds, and the islands, and such like; but I never knew who it was. No man is worthy of her, that 's one thing."

"*He* is," I answered.

"I 'm glad to hear it," said the Skipper. "Lord bless you! *I* see it all, and so did my wife, the very last trip she came with us, my wife being abroad with the young uns for air. It was blowing pretty high guns, sou'-eastern by east off shore; and when we come to the harbor's mouth there was Tom Wyatt, with his pilot just aboard, beating in with railway iron, and an assorted lot from London, in that b—h of a W. S. Lindsay's *Troubadour*. I don't want to be vulgar. I never *am* vulgar before I am three quarters tight, but she was, and is, a canine female which neither I nor no other pilot in the harbor could ever get about without swearing at her till the rigging frayed out through the pitch. I don't want to bear hard on W. S. Lindsay, nor no other man. But for laying the *Troubadour* to, in a gale of wind, why, I wish he 'd do it himself. That he is the best shipbuilder in the world, I don't deny; but why Providence picked me out to take that earliest experiment of his into harbor the first month of my appointment and risk my certificate, I shall never know. Well, as I was saying, Tom, he hails me to take him on board, and give him a cast up the harbor, for God's sake. And I, knowing what he was so mad about, knowing that he had left his wife a year ago, three months gone, slacked and sent a boat for him; for all his 'n were gone, in a cyclone off Kerquebus Head, he having took to sail by Maury, and having made southing. And my lads (you know the sort *I* sail with) had the boat in before five minutes were gone, though I did n't half like it; for the whale-boat that had put his pilot on board, had been devilish near swamped, and was making rather bad weather of it to leeward. However, he got into our dingy somehow, and I was thinking how the deuse we should get him on board, when your sister comes up to me, with the speaking-trumpet in her hand, and she says, — 'Captain Arkwright, put

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him out of his misery. Think what it would be to you, if you were uncertain whether those you loved best on earth were alive or dead.' And I see what she meant, though I had intended to wait till he got on board. So I takes the trumpet and I hollers, 'She is all right, and the kid, too.' And we seen him, my wife and me and your sister, bend down over the thwart with his face in his hands: and then I knew that your sister was right. And he came aboard, Lord knows how, and had a wash and a shave, and tried to eat his breakfast, but could n't."

I recognized my sister's hand here, most entirely, and I told him so, but he went on with his narrative.

"And when I went to my cabin, my wife says to me, 'She 's got it,' and I said, 'Who 's got it?' 'Emma Burton,' she says. And I said, 'What 's she got, — the rheumatis?' And she said, 'You need n't be a fool, for you know what I mean well enough. *She 's got it*, and all I hope is that he is worthy of her, that is all, — nothing more. I hope he may be worthy of her. No, Jim, we knew there was some one, but we never knew who it was.'"

And with such discourse we whiled away the night, with that curious and occasionally pleasant disregard of night and day, which is only to be found among working sailors and young ladies, who are dancing with a view to matrimony. I have forgotten so much of the art of navigation as I once knew, but I have a hazy idea still, in this year 1862, that the first dog-watch is coincident with supper-time. Don't ask me for any moral reflection on this point; and as for making fun, why, men have made fun in strange places. "C'est de froid," said poor old Bailly, and Sir Thomas More too. Oh, yes, we have precedents.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE CYCLONE.

On the sixth day after the departure of the steamer, the dull, close, brooding weather came to an end. Arkwright was wrong. It was the dread pause before the hurricane.

At eleven o'clock in the morning we were standing together at the fence at the lower end of my garden, looking across the bay, when our attention was attracted to a vivid green cloud approaching with horrible rapidity from over the sea; and at the same time became aware of a dull roar which grew upon the ear

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each moment. Before we had at all appreciated the dreadful disaster which had fallen upon the unfortunate town, I saw the first house struck by the wind fall crashing over after half a minute's resistance, and an utter ruin, the shingles and weather-boards, which had composed it, flying before the blast like chips of cardboard. Instantly, or it seemed to us instantly, we were thrown headlong down, bruised and terrified; and the wind seizing the earth, raised an atmosphere of flying stones and sand to a height of some six feet from the ground, which followed its course, as it seemed to us, with the rapidity of a projectile, and lacerated our hands and faces until the blood ran from them.

I raised myself as well as I could, holding on by the post of the garden gate, and looked towards my house, expecting to see it in ruins, but close as it was I could not see it for the unnatural driving fog which was between me and it. A fog of stones, and dust, and sticks, and boughs; nay, even as we found afterwards, of seaweed, which must have been carried above a mile, and fierce stinging rain, which I thought was from above, but which was only the spray blown from the surface of the ocean, a mile off. Through this I forced my way to the house, shouting for my wife, expecting to find only a heap of ruins, in which I must dig to recover the mutilated bodies of my dear ones. But it was standing safe. Emma's good taste in persuading me to leave the box-forest standing round it had saved us. The windward trees were blown in on those inside, which were still standing, and tangled with those into a screen which even the hurricane could not penetrate, and which left my house in comparative calm; so much so, that it became the hospital of the town. I cannot help remembering now, as a noticeable fact, that the whole thing was so strange, so beyond experience, that my wife, though deadly pale, and too frightened to show her fright, *had not the least idea of what had happened.* When I explained to her that it was the wind, she did not understand me.

Erne forced his way into the house, and we three stood staring at one another. I was the first to look out at the door, and the first thing I saw was the newly-built wooden church disappearing board by board, shingle by shingle, as if with an invisible fire. The thought of my father and mother came over me with a shock, and I dashed out of the house, and sped away towards their house, — not two hundred yards away, — down the wind. I was blown over and bruised in an instant. Now I was up, now I was down again; now trying to stop and see where I was going, and now falling headlong over some heap of incongruous ruin, already half-piled over with a heap of fuming sand.

This was the house. These three corner posts, standing still against the wind, and that heap of rubbish lying to leeward, al-

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ready burning fiercely with a lurid white heat, at the edge where it was smitten by the wind. But, thank God, here they were, safe and sound; my mother crouched behind a rock, and my father bending over her; the dear old gentleman with his coat off, trying to shield her sacred head from the furious tornado.

We had to wait for a lull in the wind. Martha says I was away nearly two hours, — I should have said ten minutes. How we got back over that two hundred yards I don't know, more than that my father and I struggled on first, arm-in-arm, dragging her behind us, with a shawl passed round her waist: but we got there somehow. Martha, with the child, the two maids, and my groom, were all standing close together near the door, silent and terrified. I saw that Erne was standing by the fireplace, but I knew that his thoughts were the same as mine, so I dared not look at him, for fear of seeing my own fear look at me out of his eyes.

The storm raged on, how long I cannot say, nor can I say whether we were silent all the time, or whether we talked incessantly. But at the end of some period a figure stalked in through the door and confronted us.

Trevittick, bareheaded, bloody, in his shirt and trousers only. To my London mind, so jealous of any departure from my own particular conventionalism, Trevittick always appeared more than half mad. On the present occasion, it occurred to my excited brain, that if all the devils which possessed the Gadarene swine had entered into the most hopeless lunatic in Tyre or Sidon, that he would have looked uncommonly like Trevittick, as he came hurling in out of the wild witch Sabbath of the winds, which was tormenting the terrified earth without. And, upon my word, I believe I am right; a Jew or a Cornish Phœnician can look wonderfully mad on the slightest occasion. But I succumbed to Trevittick after this. I never accused him of being mad any more.

"What are you doing here?" he said, in a loud angry growl. "Four able-bodied men here in a place of safety, among the women, on such a day of wrath as this! Do you know that the town is destroyed and on fire, and I who have been expecting to hear the last trump sound every day for I know not how long, come back from my work and find you hiding here. Cowards, come on!"

We went out at once with him into the gale. Erne and my groom first, my father and I followed with Trevittick.

"Trevittick," said my father, "you are in one of your moods. Drop it a bit, old chap, and answer me a question or two. Will this storm extend very far?"

"My dear Mr. Burton," said Trevittick, in quite another tone,

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"I cannot say for another hour or two; if the wind shifts rapidly, we may hope, according to my theory, that the diameter of the storm is small. If it holds in the same quarter long we may conclude that the diameter is greater. But it is impossible to say whether the wind is shifting yet; I cannot decide for another two hours, but I like the look of these lulls, and this sudden violence, I confess."

"But, in God's name, what do you *think* of it Trevittick?"

"I don't like it altogether," said Trevittick; "the preparation was so long. The same weather, and height of mercury was reported from Palmerston by Arkwright. I must tell the truth, Mr. Burton, I cannot lie. It looks to me like a 1783 business."

"Now, Trevittick," said my father, "we are both driving at the same point. Speak the word for me,—I dare not speak it myself."

"The *Wainora?*"

"Ah!"

"I *hope* she is in the lee of the Bird Islands,—I *hope* so; she *may* be."

"Then do you think she has sailed?" said my father.

"She sailed," said Trevittick, taking my father's arm, and speaking slowly, "on the 11.30 flood on Wednesday. If she did n't, take my shares and get a new manager. Arkwright was deceived about the weather and the mercury, for he told you so. I, loving you and yours, calculated every chance, as you see. I was deceived too, for I got it into my head that the Lord was coming, in clouds of glory, with all His angels around Him, angels and archangels, and all the company of glorified saints, with crowns of gold,—stop me, stop me!—the *Wainora!*"

"Ay, the *Wainora*, old friend," said my father, quietly.

"And the sea gave up her dead," replied Trevittick, wildly throwing his hands over his head; "and they cast down their golden crowns,—hush!—I 'll be still directly. The town's afire, and that has excited me; I have n't got your dull Saxon blood, you know. The *Wainora?*—why she may have got to the leeward of the Bird Islands. That is our chance. But don't anticipate. Keep Mr. Hillyar at work, and work yourself. Don't think of it."

And, indeed, there was little time to think; for the town was a heap of ruins, which began to blaze up more strongly as the wind partially lulled. Scarcely any house in the great straggling village had been without a fire of logs when the wind smote it, and the flimsy wooden houses,—their materials dried to the extreme pitch of inflammability,—had been blown down on these fires; and each domestic hearth had become a further source of horror. When we got to the end of the main street, we saw lit-

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tle beside gray heaps of ruins, rapidly igniting; the smoke from which was being carried into the dark storm-tossed forest beyond, making its long aisles dim with a low-lying, driving mist of smoke.

Erne rushed headlong into the thick of it, after Trevittick. His strength came back under his wild excitement, and his eagerness to forget himself. It was not so with either myself or my father. We worked, certainly, always keeping close together, but we worked without much heart, in spite of the horrors around us: what those horrors were, it is no part of my duty to describe. When the tale was made up there were forty-six dead, of which number fifteen had been burnt to death while lying helpless under the ruins. Others who were saved, and lived, were terribly scorched and maimed. The total number of killed and wounded was but little under one hundred.

It was thirty-four hours before the centre of this dreadful cyclone reached us. Within an hour or two of the beginning of it, the forest had caught fire, and the fire had gone roaring off inland; so that the first night, in addition to our other terrors, we had the crowning one of a wall of seething fire to the leeward, barred by the tall black stems of the box trees; a hill of fire, in which animal life could not exist. But by the time that the centre had reached us, the fire had passed away, and left only a ruined, smouldering forest behind it. When the calm came, the deadly stillness was only broken by the crash of falling boughs from the still burning trees, or by the thundering fall of some great monarch of the forest; which having withstood the wind had at last succumbed to the gnawing flame.

When the calm came, I saw Erne for the first time, for he had been in the thick of it with Trevittick. He was wild, pale, and wan; burnt dreadfully across his face, which was blackened with smoke; his clothes torn and scorched, with one bruised arm slung up across his breast: nothing left of the handsome old Erne but the two blue black eyes, blazing brighter than ever. He came to me, just as my father had finished saying the prayer, "Lord, receive the soul of this Thy servant," over Jim Reilly, the horse-stealer, who had stolen his last steed and shut the stable-door.

"So this is the end of it all," said Erne. "Have you been down to the bay? Every ship is ashore or sunk. I agree with Trevittick: this is the beginning of the end. Human life is about to become impossible on the face of the globe. It will not be long now before the more visible portents will begin to show themselves."

Trevittick had done his work pretty quickly. He had contrived to put a larger quantity of his own nonsense into Erne's head in four and thirty hours than I should have conceived possible. And Erne had never lost that childishness which had

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been so carefully fostered by his father, and the soil, for that sort of thing, was in a good state. Erne, lowered by illness, famine, and hardship; maddened by the scene around him, and the full certainty that Emma must have perished, took to Trevittick's nonsense as a child takes to its mother's milk. Trevittick's theory that the end of the world had come, had the effect of making all other things look small and insignificant, and I believe was partly the cause of his not going mad.

If poor Erne looked wild and terrible in the midst of the havoc, what shall I say of Trevittick himself, as he came up to us during the lull, asking for water? A zealot, driven from court to court of the burning temple, pausing for one more wild rush upon the Roman spears, must have looked very like him. His Jewish face, wearing that look of determined strength, and yet of wild, half-subdued passion, which we Londoners know well, and dislike to use if we can help it, was more strange and awful than his bare scorched bosom, or the blood which had soaked through his clothes, and even now trickled on the ground where he stood. He drank water eagerly, and then beckoned me to come aside with him.

I expected to hear some wild outbreak of fanatacism, some mad nonsense or another. But no. He had reserved all that sort of thing for Erne, it seemed, and now talked the commonest, shrewdest sense.

"It will be all over in twenty hours," he said; "we shall have the wind back from the other quarter directly. As soon as you can travel, get out the horses, and take Erne south till you meet the mail. If the *Wainora* has sailed, she is wrecked. If so, she is wrecked somewhere on the coast. Keep him riding up and down the coast, looking for intelligence of her, so that if the worst has happened, it may come over his mind by degrees, and while he is alive, for I don't like the look of his eyes. Take Tom Williams with you, and ——"

Back through the groaning forest came the return blast, cracking the half-burnt trees into ruins, and bearing the smoke of the burning forest before it like a curtain of darkness. We spoke no more, for this new phase of the hurricane was more terrible to look on than any which had preceded it. I saw the forest light up again into a more lurid blaze than before, which apparently was bearing down straight upon us, and I would have run back that I might perish with my wife and my child in my arms. But Trevittick's strong hand restrained me, and he laughed.

"Don't be a coward," he said, "there is no danger now. Look at this, man, if you have manhood; you will never see the like in fifty miles. Look aloft."

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I did so. The smoke was clearing fast, and I saw overhead, to the windward, a wall of ink-black cloud, from which streamed, spreading below as they were caught by the wind, four or five dark purple cataracts of rain. Terrible enough this; but why were they lit up with strange coruscating splendors of scarlet, of orange, and of violet? That was caused by the incessant leaping lightning which followed the curtain of rain.

All night the wind rushed round the house like the sighs of a dying giant; all night the thunder snarled, and the lightning leaped and hissed, till the house was as bright as day; and I sat, with the child upon my knee and my wife sitting at my feet, listening to the fierce deluges of rain which were spouting from the house-eaves.

Sometime in the night Martha took the child. She had been very silent before, from fear or what not; but I noticed that the rocking of the child to and fro did for her what it seems to do for all mothers, — it loosened her tongue.

She spoke to me, turning her quiet eyes to mine.

"I am not afraid now, James."

"You have been so brave and so good."

"Have I? I am glad of that. I was afraid I had not been doing my duty. Perhaps it was your mother kept me up."

Bless the little heroine; there were a dozen maimed creatures in the house now tended by my father and mother; who could contradict her?

"James, dear, do you like Mr. Trevittick?"

"Yes; I admire and respect him above all men whom I know next my father. He certainly does seem at times," I continued, with a thoughtful and puzzled air, "to have boiled up his Bible, Old Testament and New, Jeremiah *and* Revelations, into a sort of broth that 's too strong for my poor stomach. But he is a very noble person, old girl. Look at what we know of his life, and look at his work this last two days. Yes, I admire and love Trevittick."

"I don't," she said (to Baby, of course).

"Why not?"

"He says such dreadful things. To-day he told father (*I* heard him) that the *Wainora* had in all probability sailed before the storm came on, and that he had better prepare mother for what had most certainly happened. He said, 'Burton, you will never see your daughter again, and, though I envy her, I am deeply sorry for you.'"

"Trevittick 's a fool," I said, impatiently.

"I am glad you think that," said Martha. "Then you don't believe in the other dreadful thing he said?"

"What was that?"

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"Why, that the Day of Judgment was come, and that the last trump would sound as soon as the wind changed. I am particularly glad that you don't believe that."

I don't know what made me ask her, "Why?"

"Because I am so happy, dear. If I were to lose you or Baby I would n't mind so much, though there is a good deal to be thought about, and a good deal that would be very disagreeable under any circumstances. My dear, one night at Camden Town, when you had kept me out late, and I caught it, I perfectly well remember wishing Mrs. Jackson in heaven and out of the reach of temptation. Now that does n't matter talking of between us two, but it is not the sort of thing you would like to say in public. No; I want to have you a few years longer. I am glad you don't believe what Trevittick said."

I was frowning, deep in thought. Could he be right? Had Arkwright been mad enough to put to sea? If he had been such a fool as to do so in the face of the sulky mercury, I should be answerable for my sister's death, because I told him of that miserable little earthquake which Trevittick and I had heard on the mountain. That is the way in which men think in hurricanes.

"But," I heard my wife rambling on, "God would never do such a thing as that, you know. You may depend on it that Emma is safe enough. You need n't trouble your head about her. She will be well cared for wherever she goes."

And then the words of Trevittick came ringing in my ears again. "This world is not the place of punishment and reward. This world is not the place of punishment and reward." Was I to be driven mad by my own wife and a half-lunatic Cornishman?

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

JAMES BURTON'S STORY: NO ANSWER.

THE storm passed away towards the great interior; towards that great interior, cracking the stunted forests, and lashing the lovely lakes into sheets of foam; and so died in the desert, for it never reached Junor. The brisk southwest wind came up, and Nature looked beautiful once more, as though trying, while the ruin of her Berserk fit was still lying around us, to make forget that she ever could be cruel.

It was early on one of these crystal, clear mornings, which one would rashly say only existed in Australia, did one not re-

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flect that one is abroad by daylight there, and lies in bed till the day is warmed here; on a breezy, fresh morning, when the air seems to sparkle like champagne, that Erne and I got on our horses, and rode south to meet the mail.

I had, I cannot tell you why, or how fully and entirely, persuaded myself that Arkwright had never been such a fool as to put to sea. What was better still, I had persuaded Erne so; and we were both in good spirits. A natural reaction, after the horrors of the last three days had set in, and we rode swiftly and cheerfully on, without a simple misgiving as to the result of our journey.

The ruins of the storm were around us in every direction, and those hours showed us, inexperienced as we were, that it had been the greatest storm for a hundred years.

In some places whole tracks of forest were levelled; in others the trees had fallen until they had formed a screen for the wind, supported by unfallen trees to the leeward; but everywhere there was nothing but ruin and desolation. I learnt the lesson, that in so new, and so little known a country, so near the terrible tropics, great allowances should be made for great natural disturbances. I thought of the story of Jundajai, on the Morumbidgie, where the black fellows, on being asked to show the highest floodmarks, pointed to the tops of the tallest trees. The goverment surveyor laughed at them, and laid out the town. The few survivors of that disaster lived to tell how the river rose sixty feet in a single night.

So we went southward. Half way to Pitt, the first important town, we met my youngest brother, Fred, who, by some original line of thought, had arrived at the conclusion, that the hurricane had given him an indefeasible right to run away from school, borrow a horse, and come northward, to see how we were getting on.

We took him back with us, and reached Pitt that night. Fred's report was right. The destruction at Pitt was scarcely less than that at Romilly; but the wind had come on more gradually, with deluges of rain, so there had been no fire. *Pitt* had been blown to ruins piecemeal, but the destruction of *Romilly* had been sudden, terrible, and unexpected. Erne pointed out this "conceit" to me next morning, as we rode southward. Harry, whom we had picked up after depositing Fred, riding, with us, wondered why we laughed so boisterously at so poor a joke.

It was because a growing terror was on us of the news the mail would bring; a terror which neither of us would allow, even to himself, to exist, and which grew yet stronger as we went on. The boy Harry, who knew nothing of the state of the case, who was utterly unaware of our anxieties, went on prattling his

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beautiful nonsense, and kept us from thinking. But sometimes he would tattle about Emma, of some money he had saved to buy her a birthday present; of a bowerbird's nest which he had kept for her; of a hymn he had learnt to sing to her. Whenever he spoke of her I raised my hand, till at last the boy drew his horse back, and called to me.

I went back to him. "Why do you raise your hand when I speak of Emma?" he said. "Is she dead?"

"No, my boy. Erne is going to marry her; and he has been ill. I don't know why. Talk of anything else; don't talk of her just now."

The boy lingered after this; I had made him uneasy, and he talked no more.

We were going through some beautiful low wooded ranges,—ranges which were only a succession of abrupt rocky hills and valleys in the forest, whose height and depth were so small that they were magnificent beneath the gigantic timber. The road winding through and over them, showed us a prospect of more than a few hundred yards, and going up one of the little valleys, more beautiful than most, for it had been sheltered from the storm, and the trees were untouched, and the tall spikes of heather were blossoming fair and free; here we came on the mail. It was only a scarlet dog-cart, driven tandem, but it seemed to be more terrible than a loaded cannon, about to unlimber and begin firing.

We knew the truth in two minutes. The *Wainora* had sailed, just as Trevittick had said, on the 11.30 tide on Saturday. "Worse luck," said my friend, the mail man, but I interrupted him. I would have it all out. Now or never.

"Was my sister aboard, Tom?"

"Yes, Miss Burton were aboard," said he, looking at me for one instant, and then looking at his horses. "Oh, yes, your sister were aboard, Mr. James. Likewise Mrs. Clayton along with her. Miss Burke, she were n't on board, for I see her come back along the pier, and box a boy's ears, in front of Colton and Martin's. No more were Mrs. Huxtable on board, for she is in bed with twins. And Sam Corry's wife, she were n't aboard, for I see her buying a umberreller in Bass Street, arterwards. But Miss Burton, yes, she were aboard, because I see her standing between Captain Arkwright and Mrs. Clayton, as the boat went down the river, waving her hand, good-bye, to Miss Burke."

The man drove on, and I turned to Harry. "Ride home and tell him what you have heard." The boy turned pale and silent and went.

"We had better head for the coast, Erne."

There was no answer, but we did so. In an hour or less, rid-

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ing down a storm-ruined glen, we came suddenly upon the broad, cruel, beautiful sea, — blue, sparkling, laughing, rejoicing under a swift southeasterly breeze, and a bright summer sun.

We turned our horses' heads southward, along the sands which fringed the ocean. I mean the *ocean*. How insignificant the shores of the narrow seas appear to one who has seen, and has not had time to forget, the broad, desolate seaboard which girds the ocean. Its breadth, and the eternal thunder of the ground-swell of the rollers, which, in the calmest summer weather, make human life impossible on the margin of the great volume of water, point out the difference between it and the shores of smaller seas at once. A ride along the coast of Australia, with a sailor's sea on the right, and a houseless land to the left, is something which, once seen, is never to be forgotten.

I was glad of the ceaseless thunder of the surf, for it prevented us talking; but when our way was barred by a cape, and we had to turn inland to pass it, we talked none the more. I do not know when I first began to despair, but I know that I hardly spoke to or looked at Erne the whole of that weary day.

Sometime in it, sometime in the afternoon, I pushed my horse forward, for I saw a naked man lying asleep in the sun high up on the sand. Asleep, indeed, — in the last sleep of all, — with his face buried in the sand. When I raised his head, I remember, I saw the mark of his face taken off in the moist sand below, as perfectly as could have been done by an artist. But he was none of the *Wainora's* people; for the wreck of a little coasting craft still lay about two hundred yards to sea, saved from utter destruction by the barrier of coral reef over which she had been partly blown. The poor young fellow had stripped and tried to swim ashore, but the rollers had drowned him. Of his shipmates we saw no sign. Their bodies had sunk with their clothes, and had not yet been cast up; but while we talked in a low voice together over him, there came from the low shrub-grown sandhills shoreward a mangy cur, a regular sailor's dog, who yelped round us in the madness of his joy. He had, I suspect, been watching his master, like a true blue British cur, but had gone into the scrub foraging. Our arrival he seemed to consider had put matters on their old footing. It was all right now. He bestrided his master's body and barked aloud with joy. When we rode away, he, conceiving that we were merely going for assistance, followed us to give us advice, but when we had gone a mile he stopped. We whistled and he came again, with his head on one side inquiringly. When we moved on he lost confidence in our intentions, and went scudding back as hard as he could to the corpse. I don't know what became of him, any more than I know what became of the Duc D'Enghien's

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spaniel, who lay in the ditch at Vincennes one memorable morning.

Where was the *Wainora?* No answer from the thundering surf, from the screaming sea-birds, from the whispering woodlands which fringed bay and cape; only an answer in my own heart which grew weaker and more inexorable as time went on.

We came to the lonely lighthouse, which stood on the mainland, behind the Bird Islands, which lay purple and quiet before us, twenty miles at sea. The lighthouse-keepers shook their heads. Not only had they seen nothing of her, but the comrades of the lighthouse in the furthest of the islands seaward, had no report to give. They would not say the word, but I saw it in their eyes.

At Palmerston we got intelligence. A ship had made the harbor, by good luck, in the midst of the gale. The captain reported, that nigh a hundred miles to the northward, where, he could not tell, only could guess, that he had passed a small screw steamer, with only her foremast standing, steaming in the teeth of it, and seeming to hold her own. The sea was getting up then, he said, and the last he saw of her she was clinging to the side of a great wave, like a bat on a wall.

This was all the account of her we got, and we never, never got any more. From the wild shore, from the wilder sea; from the coral reef and sandbank, from the storm-lost sailor, or from lonely shepherd on the forest lands above the cruel sea, no answer but this. She had sailed out of port, and she never made port again. A missing ship, with the history of her last agony unwritten forever.

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CHAPTER LXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

YES; she was drowned, whelmed in the depths of the cruel sea; her last work over. The final ministration of all pursued while the ship ceased to leap, and began to settle down; cheering the soul of the wretched woman who was her companion, and for whom she was dying; making, by her own high example, the passage from this world to the next less terrible to her trembling companion.

At least, so we may gain from the tenor of her life: of a certainty we shall know nothing. Not so much as a hen-coop of the *Wainora* was ever picked up at sea or on shore. Arkwright and his brave men shall lounge upon the quay no more, forever.

I leave Emma Burton to your judgment, and you will, I think, deal leniently with her. We must say a few words about the other people who have borne us company so far, before we take leave of them.

Erne Hillyar, reserving for himself only a younger brother's share of the fortune, made over the rest to Sir Reuben, in order that the baronetcy might be kept up in a befitting manner; so that Sir Reuben found himself suddenly in a very elevated position, with the means of gratifying every taste.

He developed very soon into a most terrible dandy; placing steadily before him the object of being the best dressed man in London. He never actually attained it, but he got very near the top of the tree. He was very kindly received in society, and very soon began to get on. As his father once said to him, "I have seen many a dandy made out of such stuff as you. He at first patronized the ring and the river, extensively, but since his marriage with Miss Arkpole, daughter of Sir Pitchcroft Arkpole, he has given this up, and has taken to fox-hunting and pheasant-shooting. He is most universally and most deservedly popular.

He naturally leads one on to Samuel Burton. Samuel lives at Palmerston, and his wealth has very much increased. He does not look a bit older since we first knew him; in fact, he is not what one would call an old man even yet, and has probably many years of life before him. His life has been sufficiently decent, and his wealth sufficiently large, to enable him to enter in some

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sort in the ordinary society of the little township, which may possibly do him good. Nobody but Sir George ever knew of the jewel robberies, and the stolen money seems to have prospered as far as bringing excellent interest goes. That is all I know about Samuel Burton.

Those two most excellent middle-aged gentlemen, the Hon. Jack Dawson, and James Burton, are always together at one or the other's house. They go long journeys together on horseback; and mighty pleasant it is going through a forest at sunset to see the two square gray heads, jogging on, side by side, and pricking on to receive their kindly salute. They are prospering as they deserve.

The Honorable James Burton, the simple good-humored ex-blacksmith, who has told so much of this story, was over in England in 1862, as Commissioner to the International Exhibition. The other Cooksland Commissioner was the Honorable Joseph Burton, his brother. Mrs. James Burton, and Mrs. Joseph Burton, were compared by some people as samples of Australian beauty. But, in fact, neither of them were Australian. Mrs. James Burton was a Wiltshire girl, who had once been a servant; and Mrs. Joseph was the widow of Lieutenant North, of the Engineers. Mrs. James was undoubtedly the most beautiful; and many people were very much taken by the extreme repose of her manner; but she could not for a moment compare with Mrs. Joseph in vivacity and powers of conversation. They were both of them, however, in their different ways, thought very nice.

Mr. Compton is dead, and has left all his money (£96,000, by the way) to Baby, Sir George Hillyar's boy, who has been sent over to England by James Oxton, and is now at Harrow. This leads us to speak of the Dowager Lady Hillyar.

Some folks say that she is not quite so cracked as she was, but some, on the other hand, say that she is worse than ever. *Que voulez-vous?* One thing we know about her which seems worth mentioning.

When she heard of Sir George's death, she secluded herself, and they feared the worst consequences. But after a short time her grief grew tranquil, and then they discovered that death had removed the cloud which sin had brought between George and Gerty; and that she loved him with the same passionate devotion as ever. She is much alone now, and her voice is less gay. Sometimes a solitary shepherd, far in the aisles of the dark forest, will be startled, by seeing a figure in black pass slowly across the farther end of some long drawn glade, and disappear into the boscage once more; and then he will say to himself, "the mad Lady Hillyar." Or the native, crouched by the lake in the crater, waiting for the wildfowl, by the lonely shoreless lake unfolded

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in the steep treeless downs, would watch with eager curiosity the black figure, the only dark thing in the blazing landscape, which slowly crossed a segment of the sunny slope, topped the hill and was gone. But whenever her wandering feet brought her home; and where was her home but with James Oxton? whenever she came into the room where he sat, his wife would notice that a shade would cross his face, as though he said to himself, "It was I did this."

Erne turned his back on a country which had become hateful to him; and coming to England, managed to get a commission in the army (he was but just of age), and disappeared into the war-cloud in the East.

There is one more figure I should like to see before I close and part from the reader. Ah! here. Who is this tall woman standing so steady and so firm, on the very summit of this breezy cape? She has dismounted from her horse, and is quite alone; the bridle is over her left arm, and with that hand she has gathered up the loose folds of her riding-habit, which fits her magnificent figure so nobly, but with her right hand, with the hand which holds her whip, she is shading her eyes, for she is gazing steadily seaward. Why loiter here, Lesbia Burke, idly dreaming? That happened five years ago, and can the sea give up its dead. Sooner shall one of those purple islands at which you are gazing break from its moorings and ground in the surges which are thundering three hundred feet below, than shall the dead come back. But good-bye, Lesbia Burke, a hundred times good-bye.

THE END.

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